

*A Complete Historical Profile of John Wood, the Early Woodvale Settlement, and Later Deep  
River County Park*

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*Dedicated to Roger Carter and the Carter family for teaching me about Lake County, the  
importance of local history, and too many other things to mention*

**Intro:** On the far eastern edge of Lake County, Indiana, is one of the best kept gems in the northern part of the Hoosier state. Deep River County Park on Old Lincoln Highway and County Line Road is one of counties most secluded, picturesque, and cherished parks; it also has a long, intriguing, and sometimes secretive history. Deep River County Park and historical site was originally a prosperous and well-known grist-mill settlement founded by John Wood and later known as Woodvale. John Wood is an immensely important historical figure in Lake County and the settlement of Indiana's last frontier territory. Yet many residents in the county and region don't know much about the man, his life, trades, business, and the legacy he left behind. This exceptionally important local historical figure helped to lay the foundation of settlement that became one of Indiana's most populous, industrious, and business-orientated counties. So who was John Wood? And why does the county choose to remember this early settler by maintaining the park in his family's honor?

**Thesis:** John Wood was a craftsman of multiple trades, a pioneer, settler, early industrialist, businessman, social activist, and was deeply involved in local politics. He was a product of the times he lived through and held strong beliefs. The impact of his long life and hard work can still be seen today in the county park where his family's mill continues to stand and in the school that bears his name. Both of which exist as public historical monuments to not only a man and family, but to a time period in American history when northwestern Indiana was still considered a frontier. The purpose of this historical essay is to: (1) explore, understand, and gain better knowledge about John Wood, the Woodvale community, and his continuing legacy; (2) to place all the known information about John Wood, his family, the mill, and the property concentrated in one essay; and (3) to generally shed more light on the fascinating historical

development of Lake County, the state of Indiana, and the burgeoning United States of America in the 1830s as the frontier of the old Northwest unceremoniously closed forever.

**Sources/Historiography:** Putting together a complete historical picture of John Wood, Woodvale, and development of Deep River Park was not an easy task. There were unfortunately few primary sources, repeated information in most secondary sources, and nowhere was the story complete. There are no primary documents from John Wood himself and none known to exist from the early Wood family generally. To construct this essay secondary historical writings were heavily consulted, some of which were written during John's life. Also by looking at interviews by Wood family members, old journal articles about Lake County history, and newspaper articles from the region a more complete picture of the man and his ideas comes into focus. Important secondary sources include: T.H. Ball's *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*; Wenston A. Goodspeed and Charles Blanchard's *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*, these first two being written in John Wood's own lifetime; T.H. Ball's second historical account of Lake County, titled *Lake County, Indiana, 1884: An Account of the Semi-centennial Celebration of Lake County, September 3 and 4, with Historical Papers and Other Interesting Records...*; Ball's *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900: or A View of our Region Through the Nineteenth Century*; William Frederick Howat's (supervising editor) *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume I*; and also, the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, State of Indiana *The Calumet Region Historical Guide*. There were quite a few other secondary sources consulted either for background or for corroborating information, but many of them essentially copied the information in earlier historical sketches almost word for word. All sources consulted are listed at the end of the essay.

As was stated prior, primary sources from John Wood are elusive and probably do not exist. As far as primary documents examined in the research for this topic the testimony of Mary Vincent (John Wood's daughter and Woodvale settler from birth) was a surprising find. Also, another great primary document was the application by the Lake County Parks and Recreational department for the National Register of Historic Places. An Essay written by A. J. Smith of Hobart in 1924 for the unveiling of the two-ton granite monument outside the mill was also an important historical sketch of the Wood family, including first-hand information from Wood family members. Lastly, one of the more important primary sources were old newspaper articles on the family; over fifty articles were organized, consulted, and used in writing this essay running from the end of Nathan Wood's life to the late 1990s. Newspapers consulted included: *The Times of Munster*, In; *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co.* of Valparaiso, IN; *The Huntington Press* of Huntington, IN; *The Indianapolis Star* of Indianapolis, IN; and finally *The Chicago Tribune* of Chicago, IL. Scanned and digitized newspaper articles are only available going back to the early 1900s, which obfuscates information about John Wood, but they add a plethora of information about the later family, the mill property, and the development of the park.

Finally, a great media source was the short documentary available to watch on youtube called "Wood's Historic Grist Mill," by Mark Passine, published in 2013. This very professionally produced short documentary looks at Deep River Park, gives a brief yet thorough history of John Wood, the Wood family, Woodvale, and the later development of the park itself. It's a suggested watch for any local historian and a good documentary to show in school classes, kick-start discussion, and learn from. It includes video of the mill, interviews, history and old video of the park's and the saw-mill's construction, and includes general history about Lake County. This was a great find that added a lot of helpful explanations that illuminated the Wood

family's life and legacy. A more detailed bibliography including sources used, all sources consulted, and some short annotations can be found at the end of the essay.

**The Story of John Wood:** John Wood was born near Boston, Massachusetts, on October 28, 1800, as the last of eleven children born to Moses and Sarah (Baker) Wood. Most credible sources state he was born in Danvers, though there are some sources that dispute this.<sup>1</sup> John Wood's father, Moses, was a Revolutionary War veteran, a 'minuteman' who fought the British at the Battle of Lexington.<sup>2</sup> John grew up in one of the former focal points of Revolutionary War era protests and battles as the burgeoning republic was being created and expanding beyond the thirteen original colonies; it was stated that John was "reared in a community rich in revolutionary history and learning and developed well in science, art, literature..."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Moses Wood died when John Wood was a young boy and his mother put him in the care of family friends where his upbringing continued, within a few years he entered the apprenticeship of a tanner, still just a boy.<sup>4</sup> After apprenticing in the trade, John went into business for himself as a master-tanner. It is not known exactly where John was in 1812, but

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<sup>1</sup> There are different claims made in different sources about the birthplace of John Wood. Danvers seems to be the most likely, though some sources have claimed Salem, Boston proper, generally New England, and also more specifically Peabody, though Peabody is certainly where he had his first farm later in life. The two-ton granite monument erected by the Wood clan in 1924 claims Danvers, as does Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884: An Account of the Semi-centennial Celebration of Lake County, September 3 and 4, with Historical Papers and Other Interesting Records...* T. H. Ball, Editor and Publisher for the Old Settlers Association of Lake County. Crown Point, IN: T. H. Ball, Publisher, 1884. Pg. 435-436. He most likely moved around the Boston area throughout his life, which adds confusion.

<sup>2</sup> Goodspeed, Wenston A. and Charles Blanchard. *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1882. Pg. 717. See Also: Lester, J. William. "Pioneer Stories of the Calumet." *Indiana Magazine of History* Vol 18, No. 4 (Dec. 1922): 347-58 (12 pages). URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27786042>. Also see: Lester, J. William. "Pioneer Stories of the Calumet." *Indiana Magazine of History* Vol 18, No. 4 (Dec. 1922): 347-58 (12 pages). URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27786042>. Pg. 171-172. On the revolutionary war veteran ancestor: Mrs. Mary Vincent (Wood)'s account of her father's past, she explains that he was at Lexington, though Goodspeed's book said it was Bunker Hill. Revolutionary War Veteran records of Massachusetts show a Moses Wood of similar description having been called to serve for several days at and after the Battle of Lexington. It seems to be most likely that he was at the Battle of Lexington. He could have served longer or in other battles, more extensive research needs to be done.

<sup>3</sup>Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>4</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 717.

being near Boston and living on the coast, he would have lived through the events of the War of 1812 and the British invasion of Washington D.C., only being about twelve years old. On November 16, 1824, he married Hannah E. Pattee. Hannah Pattee was born in New England on October 13, 1802, she is reported to be of noble lineage.<sup>5</sup> She was the daughter of Eliphalet Pattee, the son of Revolutionary War veteran Seth Pattee, both John and Hannah seem to have had strong ties to the American Revolution and revolutionary war ideals.<sup>6</sup> Hannah was described by one of her daughters-in-law as being “the sweetest woman, always doing good turns for people, a real peace maker and to her is due credit for no saloons being allowed in the village while her family was growing up. She was a good wife and mother, truly loved by all.”<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that she was a Unitarian.

John and Hannah moved around the Massachusetts Bay Area and Boston, and finally set-up for some time at a farm in Peabody. This is where Nathan, Augustus, Abbie M., John W. (who died at birth), and George Wood were born.<sup>8</sup> Documents show that John Wood was commissioned by the governor of Massachusetts, Levi Lincoln, first as a Cornet, and later was promoted to Lieutenant, in a company of the Battalion of Cavalry in the first Brigade and second division of the Militia of the Commonwealth between 1826 and 1828.<sup>9</sup> During this time it can generally be ascertained that he practiced his trade, saved and bought a farm, raised a family, and served his home state; acting in many ways as a model citizen of the new democratic republic.

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<sup>5</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 717.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127. Pg. 124.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127. Pg. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Goodspeed, Wenston A. and Charles Blanchard. *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 718.

<sup>9</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884: An Account of the Semi-centennial Celebration of Lake County, September 3 and 4, with Historical Papers and Other Interesting Records...* T. H. Ball, Editor and Publisher for the Old Settlers Association of Lake County. Crown Point, IN: T. H. Ball, Publisher, 1884. Pg. 436-437.

On May 28, 1830, Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which authorized the federal government to sell lands west of the Mississippi to Native tribes in exchange for their land within existing state borders. At this time still much of northern Indiana was inhabited by the Potawatomi. Through various meetings and treaties, the state acquired the lands of the Potawatomi in Northwest and Northern Indiana by 1832/1833, and though it is reported that some lingered in that area until as late as the 1860s, many were forced out of their lands by the late 1830 and early 1840s as a result of those treaties.<sup>10</sup> Land in Porter County, to the east of Lake, wasn't legally sold on the market until 1835. While land in Lake County wasn't legally sold on the market until 1839. Before that, early pioneer settlers were laying claim to and squatting on government owned land, on which Potawatomi continued to live, farm, hunt, and fish. There was much confusion surrounding the several October 1832 treaties with the Potawatomi that ceded the lands of Northwestern Indiana, which included the area John Wood would come to inhabit. Though some Potawatomi were generally allowed to exist in their villages, others were given a time table of several years, and still others weren't given a specific definitive answer at all. Quite a few prominent Potawatomi chiefs had opposed selling land in northwestern Indiana, complained of being taken advantage of and divided in treaty negotiations, and continued to live in Northwestern Indiana for some time afterwards until later forced removal.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Madison, James H. *The Indiana Way: A State History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986. Pg. 122-126. McDonald, Daniel. *Removal of the Pottawattomie Indians from Northern Indiana*. Plymouth, IN: D. McDonald & Co., Printers and Binders, 1899. Pg. 13-19. Barce, Elmore. *The Land of the Potawatomi*. Fowler, IN: Indiana Historical Society, 1919. Pg. 33-41.

<sup>11</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900: or A View of our Region Through the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago, IL: Donohue & Henneberry, 1900. Pg. 59-60. The history and background of the Lake County Squatters' Union is deserving of its own historical essay. It's fascinating if only for the radicalism it was willing to go to in order to defend their claims. Also see: Edmunds, Russel David. *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978. Pg.241-243. There were three treaties with the Potawatomi of Northern IL, IN, and Southern MI in October 1832, one gave the right to continue to live on their land until land sales to settlers, one gave years to live before being removed, another left unspecified exactly what should happen. All renegotiated treaties later, and most reservations from these treaties were sold to the federal or state government in subsequent treaties.

Working-class settlers from further east, eager to make a new life for themselves and get a headstart in claiming the newly acquired land, had been slowly trickling into these areas in northern Indiana despite restrictions. John Wood was a craftsman living through an ever-changing and rapidly evolving economy in an industry that was being mechanized, de-skilled, and collected into early factories on the east coast. Prospects of freedom in this ‘new land’ must have outweighed the struggle to establish an existence on the east coast because he was among the first in the new state territory.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it was stated that John Wood “desired to invade the ‘unknown’ and there develop and work out a broader plane of freedom and usefulness for himself and his family.”<sup>13</sup> His one true motivation for migrating with his young family from an established trade and life near Boston to an unincorporated swampy wilderness in northwestern Indiana “was for freedom, that freedom which phantoms some to success and happiness, others to failure and degradation.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1835, John Wood, along with three or four other associates traveled to Michigan City as commissioned surveyors. Wood then proceeded by himself in search of a proper mill site to the area where the Deep River meets the old Sauk Trail at the eastern edge of the unorganized territory of Lake County.<sup>15</sup> Lake County (along with much of Northern Indiana) had been

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<sup>12</sup> Besides John Wood there was a handful of other important early settlers in Lake County, all with colorful stories, including William Ross (namesake of Ross Township), Solon Robinson (founder of Crown Point and leader of Lake County), the Fowlers, the Dinwiddies, Jeremiah Wiggins (early Settler of Merrillville), the Saxtons (also of Merrillville) George Earle (of Hobart and namesake of Lake George), the Pierce family (namesake of Pierce Intermediate School), and more. See Ball, Timothy Horton. *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900: or A View of our Region Through the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago, IL: Donohue & Henneberry, 1900. Pg. 50-52. See also: Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>15</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. 302-303. See also: Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

recently acquired by the United States government and the State of Indiana from the local Potawatomi peoples. Lake County at that time was still almost completely still the land of the Potawatomi. There were many villages, trails, dancing grounds, sacred areas, and burial grounds.<sup>16</sup> Potawatomi could be seen traversing the rivers in canoes and hunting the areas where the prairies met the woods. Lake County and Calumet Region was well-known for its lush vegetation, marshy swamps, and abundance of all kinds of wildlife. John Wood laid claim to the area where the red-brick mill currently stands, along with the surrounding area to settle and start a new life. John built a small cabin then returned to Massachusetts to gather his family, pack up his old life on the East Coast, and then made the trip to Lake County with his wife and young children.

Upon returning to northwestern Indiana, John learned that the land he had claimed had already had a float put upon it by a local Potawatomi chief named Quash-mau (Quash-ma, Quash-maw, Quash-man). Quash-mau had been promised the land in the October 27th, 1832, treaty between the Potawatomi, the United States Government, and the State of Indiana. Though, according to land records in LaPorte (where they were held for some time before both Lake and Porter were organized), Quash-mau did not lay claim to his land in those specific coordinates until May 5th, 1836.<sup>17</sup> As a site claimed for a mill, John's claim would have lawfully superseded the claim as a float. However, because the float had been laid by Indiana Senator and

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<sup>16</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 302-303.

<sup>17</sup> Kappler, Charles Joseph; compiled and edited by. *Indian affairs: laws and treaties, Vol. 2 (Treaties 1788-1883)*. United States Government: Government Printing Offices, 1904. Digitized through Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Library Digital Collections. URL to October 27, 1832 treaty: <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/26213>. See also: Howat, M.D., William Frederick (supervising editor). *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume 1*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. Pg. 46. Quash-mau's float was located on sect. 21, township. 35, mg. 7. It states that: "...as a mill site, according to law or usage [the site] was not properly subject to an Indian float. But the float had been laid by a senator [John Tipton and presumably in accordance with the October 27, 1832 treaty]; and the location was very much wanted by the claimant, and so he [John Wood] purchased the land from the Indian Quashma." For Early Land Records in Northwest Indiana visit Indiana Archives and Records Administrations, "Indian Lands Noted On The LaPorte-Winamac Land Office." URL: <https://www.in.gov/iara/divisions/state-archives/collections/land-records/indian-lands-noted-on-the-laporte-winamac-land-office/>.

former Indian Agent, John Tipton, on behalf of Quash-mau, and because Quash-mau apparently so desired the site, John was heavily motivated to pay Quash-mau's asking price. So, instead of only paying the original cheap \$200 (equivalent to about \$600 in 2021) for the entire area of land, John had to pay Quash-mau a total of \$1000 (equivalent to about \$30,000 in 2021).<sup>18</sup>

As has already been stated, the land was not actually available to purchase for ownership, use, or settlement until 1839. The legality of the living situation for settlers during this time period was questionable; technically settlers were living on government owned land which was still occupied by the Potawatomi. John had legal exemption to buy and use land due to his mill business operations, and he had purchased his land legally through Quash-mau who was the legal and rightful owner. But many early settlers were legally not the owners of the land they claimed and were therefore squatting. Many were part of the Lake County Squatter's Union, made to help early settlers keep the land they claimed when it would finally be brought to market; to keep them from being bought out by newer settlers or land speculators after they did the work of clearing the land.<sup>19</sup> It is not clear if John was a part of the Squatter's Union, though it had 476 signatures at its inception on July 4th, 1836; many of the prominent early settlers of Lake county. John might have joined to further insure his claim and business. Though as was stated, John had legal exemption to buy and use land due to his mill business operations, and he had purchased his land legally through Quash-mau; it is not at all certain whether John was a member of the squatter's union.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 302-303.

<sup>19</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Chapter 2. For Squatter's Union Constitution see also: Ibid. Pg 40-50. For more references see also: Howat, M.D., William Frederick (supervising editor). *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume 1*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. Pg. 58-59. See also: Ball, Timothy Horton. *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900: or A View of our Region Through the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago, IL: Donohue & Henneberry, 1900. Pg. 59-60; 421-422.

<sup>20</sup> Howat, M.D., William Frederick (supervising editor). *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume 1*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. Pg. 46-47. For Squatter Union Info: Ball, Timothy

Besides Quash-mau's float, the area where John settled had a long history of interaction with many different Native American tribes, being a natural major intersection of various bodies of water and waterways in a highly traversed area of the Great Lakes region. Apparently there was one smaller Potawatomi village in or near the site that John Wood would claim cited in early settler histories. This village could have been called "Shanoquac village," which is cited on 1830s maps of the local native American trails in the Calumet Region.<sup>21</sup> Not much else is known about the settlement, its exact location in the area, or its history.<sup>22</sup> According to many sources, the Deep River area was sacred and known historically to many different native tribes. Not only did the old Sauk Trail pass through the area, an ancient Mississippian native American mound once sat on the property and was still revered by other natives, including the local Potawatomi, up to John Wood's time. Unfortunately its location now is harder to accurately pinpoint and has surely deteriorated.<sup>23</sup> As well, there were reported to be as many as eight sites where natives steamed themselves when sick near that area of the Deep River.<sup>24</sup> At that time and into about the early 1840s there were many Potawatomi still living in that area, several established villages were still functioning into the mid and late 1830s. Mary Vincent, the daughter of John Wood who grew up in the settlement, had fond memories of trading with and seeing Potawatomi

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Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 39-50. It is really not at all certain if John was part of the Squatter's Union, only the original Squatter's Union charter would tell, it had 476 signatures. The location of the Squatter's Union original constitution is not known to the author. Most likely John would have joined as a kind of back up 'insurance plan' to his claim and business; especially seeing as he had already had it almost taken from him in his absence to retrieve his family in Massachusetts. It was also an organization of like-minded people for John Wood, the freedom of Lake County and the unrestrictive attitude would have been a draw to a personality like John Wood.

<sup>21</sup> Meyer, Alfred H. "Circulation and Settlement Patterns of the Calumet Region of Northwest Indiana and Northeast Illinois (The First Stage of Occupance--the Pottawatomie and the Fur Trader,--1830)." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 44, No. 3 (Sept. 1954): 245-74 (30 pages). URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2561456>.

<sup>22</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg 73.

<sup>23</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg 73.

canoeing, fishing, and hunting in and around the area on the Deep River in those very early frontier days. Around 1841/42 a group of Potawatomi being removed from Michigan by the U.S. Army were brought through northwest Indiana on the Sauk Trail and stayed near Deep River. The Wood family hosted several officers at the settlement.<sup>25</sup> The Wood family would have had regular trade and business with the Potawatomi in the waning years in their native territory, as they were slowly removed westward. It was reported later that Nathan Wood had amassed a small collection of Potawatomi arts, crafts, weapons, clothes, and utensils over a lifetime of interactions with the local Potawatomi and clearing lands.<sup>26</sup>

Once John had officially in his possession the land in the vicinity that is now the Deep River park, he undertook the task of clearing the land and carving out a life in the swampy secluded woods at the edge of the prairies in the summer of 1836.<sup>27</sup> Initially settling on the east side of the river, they later moved to the park's current area on the west side of the river. Here John and his family built a saw-mill in 1837. And a year later, in 1838, after clearing more land, they built the first grist-mill that sat on the property for the purpose of making flour.<sup>28</sup> At the time, this was the first and only working grist-mill in Lake or Porter Counties; the first ever industrial site in a region that would become well-known for its major industries. Its location right on the dividing line of the two counties was ideal, but so too was the fact that John had picked this location at the confluence of the Deep River and the old Sauk Trail. The Sauk Trail was an old Native American trail that led from the Chicago (Fort Dearborn) area to Detroit. It was initially used mainly by the Sauk to collect annual treaty allotments at Detroit from the

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<sup>25</sup> Lester, J. William. "Pioneer Stories of the Calumet." *Indiana Magazine of History* Vol 18, No. 4 (Dec. 1922): 347-58 (12 pages). URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27786042>. Pg. 171-172.

<sup>26</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1872. Pg. 302-303.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 302-303. It is thought the original grist-mill sat on the east side of the currently standing 1876 grist-mill, basically where the water wheel of the current mill would be located.

British. Over time, the trail became a well-known route and was used by many Native American groups of that area, as well as French, British, and Americans traversing the Calumet Region. Combined with the ideal location of John Wood's mills in between Lake and Porter counties and being directly on the Sauk Trail with the power of the Deep River to run the mill, the mill became prosperous and well-known.<sup>29</sup> During these early days of clearing the land and establishing their settlement three more children were born to John and Hannah: John W., Mary, and Oliver S. Wood.<sup>30</sup>

As was said, the mill was the only grist-mill in the area of Lake and Porter counties, the operation of the mill should be viewed as the first industry in Lake (and Porter). Initially the original saw-mill was built to clear land and used as a business to fund the building of the first brick grist-mill. Once the grist-mill was in operation it was said to be a bustling place of frontier trade and business.<sup>31</sup> The mill was powered by a horizontal tub-wheel (instead of the re-created vertical wheel that exists today). An underground or ditch shoot, called a sluiceway, along with an operational gate, called a sluice gate, let water flow down away from the mill pond on the Deep River (across the road from the mill) into the horizontal tub-wheel. This spun the tub-wheel along with a vertically standing pole in the center of the tub-wheel, which in turn spun gears attached to a horizontally running pole that ran the length of the basement level of the mill. The power of the water spun the tub-wheel which moved all the gears and poles of the mill; it moved the one-ton grindstones, powered the belt elevators which moved grains through various stages of processing, spun the rollers used to crush and mash into finer meal and flour, along with other mechanisms within the operation of the mill that would grind down the grains and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Pg. 302-303.

<sup>30</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 716.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

flour into increasingly finer grades.<sup>32</sup> Obviously, they might have also ground down rye, corn, buckwheat, or other grains, but primarily the mill stones ground wheat into flour. The stones themselves were about four feet in diameter, eight to twelve inches thick, made out of solid granite, and about a ton a piece. The bottom stone, or bedstone, sat still while the top stone, the runner stone, spins on the bottom stone. The grooves or furrows etched into the stones, called the dress, acted as scissors which would cut and grind the grain finer and finer until it ended up as flour or meal.<sup>33</sup> At peak performance, Wood's Mill's two runs of stone and eight sets of rolls could grind down twelve bushels an hour.<sup>34</sup>

Once the mill was established a small settlement grew around it, initially the community was called Wood's Mill, then Woodvale, and finally much later referred to as Deep River after the establishment of a post office. John had dedicated a two-acre commons area planted with elm trees just west of his mill, near where his second dwelling was constructed, just next to the old Sauk Trail (presently approximately the area where the two-ton granite monument, Gift Shop/former church, and entryway/parking lot now sit).<sup>35</sup> John dammed and created a small mill-pond just south of the mill (across the street from it today). Several people settled near the mill, including three of his sons, and one son-in-law, daughters, and later grandchildren. One son, Augustus, ran a general store, while the son-in-law, a Dr. Vincent, was an early physician of the county and had his doctor's office located in the settlement. The settlement grew around the

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>. See Also: Unknown Author. *Wood's Historic Grist Mill Brochure* (Unknown place of publication: Lake County Parks Department assumed publisher, Unknown date,). URL for PDF: <http://www.lakecountyparks.com/DocumentCenter/View/126/Woods-Historic-Grist-Mill-Brochure-PDF?bidId=>.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

<sup>34</sup> Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, State of Indiana. *The Calumet Region Historical Guide*. Board of Education, Gary, IN: Garman Printing Co, 1939. Pg. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127. Pg. 126.

commons area and at one point had a blacksmith's shop, a shoemaker's shop, a wagon and carriage shop, and a cheese and butter factory; the cheese and butter factory was run by George Wood.<sup>36</sup> Eventually there was a school, which was later moved down near present day 73rd and Randolph after a fire. Also later a church was built in 1904 on land donated by Nathan Wood, which is now the Deep River Gift Shop.<sup>37</sup> Early in the county history John was appointed by a regular session of the Indiana Legislature to a commission to plan the first county road to run from Porter County through to Chicago. Through his influence and knowledge of the area, John Wood was able to push for the first road to run in the path of the old Sauk Trail and pass right in front of his business and through his small settlement, this road would later become the Lincoln Highway (also known as Old U.S. 30 or County Road 330 at different points in time, or sometimes erroneously as 73rd or Joliet Rd.; that portion of the road is still the Old Lincoln Highway).<sup>38</sup> Later Deep River even had a post office, for which Nathan served as the Postmaster. The office was officially called Deep River and therefore was officially recognized as Deep River by the state and on some maps, though the Wood family, locals, and local historical texts still referred to it as Woodvale into the 1910s.<sup>39</sup>

John Wood purposefully kept out saloons throughout most of his lifetime and kept the settlement dry by never actually platting the settlement as a town, which let him have more control over who bought the land which he owned and what they built; he was a dedicated follower of the temperance movement.<sup>40</sup> Though eventually a place of finer refreshments was

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<sup>36</sup> Ball, *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. Pg. 151-152. See also: Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg. 469-471. Goodspeed, Weston A. and Charles Blanchard. *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1882. Pg. 548.

<sup>37</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 546-547. For history of the church and congregation see: "Park Unit Preserves History of Church." *The Times*, Munster, IN. February 9, 1975.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

<sup>39</sup> Howat, M.D., William Frederick (supervising editor). *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume 1*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. Pg. 182; 46-47.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pg. 46-47.

opened in the settlement, a large house that operated as a dwelling, hotel, and which had a small saloon was built and operated by Mr. H. T. Smith in about 1882.<sup>41</sup> Within the first few years of settlement the death of one of John Wood's young sons, John W., forced the family to section off an area of the settlement on the east side of Deep River for a small cemetery. This cemetery which now sits on County Line adjacent to Deep River County Park, named Woodvale Cemetery, was the first settler's cemetery in Lake County.<sup>42</sup> And lastly, it should be noted that John Wood did invest in communities besides his own early on. When Liverpool was very briefly designated as the county seat, before Crown Point claimed that title, John bought land there; on what is now the north side of Hobart. This unimproved land was much later subdivided into acre and half-acre lots and sold by Wood, the subdivision that existed there for some time was named in his honor.<sup>43</sup>

By 1860, after twenty-five years of settling and milling at the mill-site at Deep River, John Wood turned the ownership and operation over to his two sons George and Nathan. Not long later George sold his share to Nathan, deciding to focus on running his cheese and butter operation. In 1872, Nathan Wood built the "most city-like dwelling in the county," when he built his brick house directly across from the mill, which still stands to this day, considered one of the finest historical houses in the county.<sup>44</sup> Nathan ran the mill well, and in 1876 built a new, improved, and modern looking mill - the red-brick 3-story structure that currently stands today.<sup>45</sup> At a high point, with several generations of the Wood extended family and others living at the

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<sup>41</sup> Goodspeed, Wenston A. and Charles Blanchard. *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1882. Pg. 547-548.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>44</sup> Ball, *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. Pg. 151-152. See also: Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg. 151-152.

<sup>45</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg. 470-471.

settlement, the population of Woodvale/Deep River reached about 50 people. The operation at the mill continued to be very successful, the mill was still widely used, and seen as a community focal point and place of industry, trade, and business.<sup>46</sup>

John Wood lived a full life outside of his mill and work, he was deeply involved in local happenings, national politics, and stayed active in various causes and social organizations. “Reared in revolutionary history,” throughout his life John displayed a dedication to republican ideals and democratic morals of the revolutionary era.<sup>47</sup> His father had fought at the open volleys of the American Revolution at Lexington, John himself was enlisted for several years in militia service in Boston, MA.<sup>48</sup> John was also present at the cornerstone laying of the monument to the Battle of Bunker Hill.<sup>49</sup> John Wood was a Boston-area Revolutionary War era craftsman, he grew up fairly poor, being put in the care of family friends and having to apprentice and work from a very young age. This, along with the legacy of his father and his mindfulness of the revolutionary age he lived in, seems to have ingrained in him a strong republican minded civic attitude. John believed in the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, expression, association; the ability to exercise constitutional rights as laid out in law; he believed in representative democracy, and opposed the oppression of those basic freedoms through undemocratic tyranny.<sup>50</sup> He was committed to the ideas that all were equal, that their labor should be their own to control, and that their lives should be theirs to prosper in whatever honest way they choose.

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<sup>46</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900: or A View of our Region Through the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago, IL: Donohue & Henneberry, 1900. Pg. 284-285.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>48</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 717-718.

<sup>49</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 717-718.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

It's no surprise to learn then that John was a fervent supporter of the Free-Soil Movement, a political movement active from the late 1840s into the mid 1850s that opposed the creation of more slave-states and the expansion of the institution of slavery following the war with Mexico in 1848. John Wood was a founding member of the Lake County Free Soil Movement and later the early Republican Party when the Free Soil movement folded into the anti-slavery platform of the Republicans.<sup>51</sup> Being from New England, believing in the republican dream of the revolution and the constitution, being a Free-Soil Party member and later a Republican party member, John Wood was clearly anti-slavery and pro-Union.<sup>52</sup> Two of his sons, George and Oliver, even served in the Civil War as Union soldiers, though not much is known about their service records.<sup>53</sup> At the time of the Civil War, Lake County was heavily in favor of the Union cause and explicitly anti-slavery. While there is no direct quote, using these known facts about John Wood it is safe to say he was probably involved with pro-Union activities in and around Woodvale during the Civil War.<sup>54</sup> It should also be noted that Nathan Wood was a known member of the Union League, a pro-Union, semi-secret, voluntary association whose main purpose was to promote loyalty to the Union, the United States Constitution, Abraham Lincoln, and to combat pro-southern, pro-slavery sentiment.<sup>55</sup> The Wood family was clearly anti-slavery, anti-Confederacy, pro-Union, and pro-Constitution.

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<sup>51</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. Pg. 39-50. See also for Free Soil Movement in Lake County: Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg. 466-469.

<sup>52</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg 466-468.

<sup>53</sup>Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>54</sup> This all can be inferred through reading above mentioned sources and other points in some of the Lake County histories, here are the sources. Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, 1884*. Pg. 466-471. See also, Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 717-718.

<sup>55</sup> John Drury. "Home Marks Birthplace of Calumet History." *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, IL. July 16, 1967. The article focuses on the home of Nathan Wood and talks about his life, being part of the Union League is mentioned.

John was also a Master-FreeMason, being a founding member of lodges in Crown Point, Valparaiso, and aiding the founding at a lodge in Wheeler as well as others around the county.<sup>56</sup> He was deeply involved with the Freemasons throughout Lake County in various capacities until his death, he was buried with full Freemason honors.<sup>57</sup> John seems to have been born into a family of Universalists and it should be noted that he was “liberal in his religious belief,” and that he attended a Community Church in Wheeler, all of which indicate a more open, loose, and accepting conception of organized religion. Once the Unitarian Church was chartered in Hobart he and his family became members and were “faithful in attendance.”<sup>58</sup> Freemasonry and the being of “liberal” religious beliefs is further indication of John Wood’s more Enlightenment-minded and egalitarian outlook on life and how society should be structured. Lastly, it is important to note that John Wood was a township trustee, on various county commissions and committees, as well as serving on the first Grand Jury in Lake County.<sup>59</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Wood seemed to have had an enjoyable and relaxing retirement, being distinguished during their lifetime as early settlers and esteemed by their neighbors and friends all around Lake County.<sup>60</sup> Hannah Wood passed away on September 27, 1873 at the age of about 71 years old. At that point John Wood’s grand-daughter, Miss Abbie Shedd, acted as his caretaker and housekeeper after her death.<sup>61</sup> John lived for about a decade longer than Hannah

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<sup>56</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg.717.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>59</sup>Smith, A.J., “John Wood,” in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127. Pg. 125.

<sup>60</sup> Ball, Timothy Horton. *Lake County, Indiana, from 1834 to 1872*. Pg. 303.

<sup>61</sup> Goodspeed and Blanchard, *History of Porter and Lake Counties, Indiana, 1882*. Pg. 718.

and passed away on December 1, 1883, at about 83 years old.<sup>62</sup> He was buried alongside his wife in the Woodvale/Deep River cemetery, the resting place of many Wood family members. The small cemetery sits just off County Line Road at the edge of the park property.

Nathan Wood ran the mill and estate until 1908, almost fifty years after he took over from his father John. At which time it seems that Nathan sold the mill to or it was handed over to one of his sons, B. H. Wood.<sup>63</sup> B. H. Wood was in the milling business with a partner in the McMahan-Wood Company, based in Valparaiso, IN, it was a milling and grain company. Around this time the mill was fitted with a back-up steam engine, in case the water pressure failed to turn the mill-stones.<sup>64</sup> McMahan and Wood separated in 1924, at which time B. H. Wood went into business for himself with the B.H. Wood & Son Company based in Valparaiso, meaning that a third and fourth generation of the Wood family were operating the mill site.<sup>65</sup> The B. H. Wood & Son Company functioned as a trusted and reliable mill and grain company throughout the 1920s and '30s in Lake and Porter counties. It seems to have not only prospered as it was, but expanded as a business enterprise by buying abandoned mills, properties, building new storhouses, and hiring more workers. B. H. was also some kind of noted expert, being

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>63</sup>Howat, M.D., William Frederick (supervising editor). *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region, Volume 1*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. Pg 182. It is stated that "members of the second and third generations carried on the mill," after the retirement and death of John Wood. This would have been Nathan, and according to newspaper articles cited, most probably B.H. Wood. B.H. Wood's son, unnamed in articles, would have been the fourth generation wood to be a miller in B. H. Wood & Son Company. See also: "Fifteen Years Ago; Jan. 21, 1928." *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN., Valparaiso, IN.* Jan. 21, 1243. See also: "Twenty Years Ago; April 17, 1921." *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN., Valparaiso, IN.* April 17, 1943. See Also: "Fifteen Years Ago; August 14, 1933." *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN., Valparaiso, IN.* August 14, 1948. See also: "Death Claims B. H. Wood." *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN., Valparaiso, IN.* May 17, 1948.

<sup>64</sup> Unknown Author. *Wood's Historic Grist Mill Brochure* (Unknown place of publication: Lake County Parks Department assumed publisher, Unknown date,). URL for PDF: <http://www.lakecountyparks.com/DocumentCenter/View/126/Woods-Historic-Grist-Mill-Brochure-PDF?bidId=>. See also: National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for "John Wood's Old Mill."

<sup>65</sup> "Fifteen Years Ago; July 15, 1924." *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN., Valparaiso, IN.* July 16, 1934.

quoted in newspaper articles of his day commenting on wheat and grain harvests and trips throughout the northwest region inspecting wheat.<sup>66</sup> B. H. Wood died of a sudden heart attack on May 16, 1948, but had previously sold or disposed of his business and the mill property at Deep River.<sup>67</sup>

At this point, the history of the mill and property is difficult to completely piece together. According to sources, the mill and some surrounding acreage were purchased by the State Highway Department in 1939 for the purpose of building a “historical parkway,” but plans were not further detailed and nothing seems to have come of that project.<sup>68</sup> It was listed as being operated by the state and still produced milled grains. This could have been when B. H. Wood sold the mill and retired. Then it is said that for some time that Olive Wood, a great-granddaughter involved in preserving the mill and settlement area, owned the grist-mill and commons area, while the church was still owned and operated by the congregation on independent land previously donated by Nathan Wood.<sup>69</sup> According to a short documentary and some sources, the mill was intact until sometime either in the 1940s or even into the early 50s, but by 1954 the mill had been stripped of a considerable amount of the machinery and left to slumber - swallowed up by the woods on the edge of Lake County.<sup>70</sup> The church, situated next to the mill, was functioning with a congregation until 1974, when its congregation moved to the new church on IN-51 in Hobart, IN.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Fifteen Years Ago; Jan. 21, 1928.” *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN.*, Valparaiso, IN. Jan. 21, 1928. See also: “Twenty Years Ago; April 17, 1921.” *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN.*, Valparaiso, IN. April 17, 1943. See Also: “Fifteen Years Ago; August 14, 1933.” *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN.*, Valparaiso, IN. August 14, 1948.

<sup>67</sup> “Death Claims B. H. Wood.” *The Vidette-Messenger of Porter Co., IN.*, Valparaiso, IN. May 17, 1948.

<sup>68</sup> Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration, State of Indiana. *The Calumet Region Historical Guide*. Board of Education, Gary, IN: Garman Printing Co, 1939. Pg. 121.

<sup>69</sup> “Park Unit Preserves History of Church.” *The Times*, Munster, IN. February 9, 1975.

<sup>70</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for “John Wood’s Old Mill.” See also: Mark Passine, uploader. “Wood’s Historic Grist Mill.” Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

<sup>71</sup> “Park Unit Preserves History of Church.” *The Times*, Munster, IN. February 9, 1975.

**Legacy:** Remembrance for John Wood and his contributions to Lake County were underway while the mill still functioned. On August 16, 1924, representatives of the Old Settlers and Historical Societies, along with members of the public and the Wood family, dedicated a two-ton granite rock with a bronze inscribed metal placard to John Wood, the mill, and the family of settlers. The occasion was recorded in the historical records of the county, including a well-written biography of John Wood. The monument was dedicated in the old commons John Wood set aside in founding the mill site. The ceremony drew over 300 people, including a dedication of historical artifacts to the county, speeches, songs, and the unveiling by Mrs. Mary Vincent (Wood), John Wood's daughter and oldest living relative at that time.<sup>72</sup> According to the report about the ceremony, Wood's old log cabin was still standing next to the mill in 1924.<sup>73</sup> And it is important to note that the Wood Family had been planning and holding well-organized family reunions starting in 1900 and held annually. There is evidence to show the family was still gathering in Lake County up to 1934, possibly longer.<sup>74</sup>

However, by the late 1960s, the mill and property were found by the Ross Historical Society and Lake County Parks and Recreation Department to be in a sad and run down state due to neglect and disassembly. The Parks Department acquired the property by the mid-1970s; the church and mill were obtained separately, and then most of the historic property of John Wood.<sup>75</sup> Restoration of the mill and property began in 1972 with initial surveys of the property by the Lake Co. Parks and Recreation Dept. Some time passed as research, plans, funds, and

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, A.J., "John Wood," in *History of Lake County, Vol. 10: Publication of the Lake County Historical Association*. John O. Bowers - Head of the Editing Committee of the Lake County Historical Association. Gary, IN: Calumet Press, 1929. Pg. 123-127.

<sup>73</sup> Lester, James W. - Compiler. *Historical Records of the Lake County Old Settler and Historical Association of Lake County, Indiana*. No Place of Publication Given: No Publication Company Given, 1924. Pg. 50.

<sup>74</sup> "Wood Family Hold Reunion at Deep River." *The Times*, Munster, IN. August 21, 1934. An interesting historical side note: John Wood had a descendant who ran as a Democrat in the 1960s, a retired civil engineer who lived in Chesterton, near old Baileytown named John C. Wood. He lost his election, but ran on a platform of expanding social programs and environmental conservation.

<sup>75</sup> "Park Unit Preserves History of Church." *The Times*, Munster, IN. February 9, 1975.

restoration took effect, but the parks department began submitting paperwork to place Wood's Historic Grist Mill on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The mill itself had to be extensively refurbished and reconstructed, the water wheel was added as a way of displaying the way similar mills looked in the past, though John and Nathan's historic grist-mill originally ran using a tub-wheel and a shoot from a mill pond that once sat directly across the street from where Lincoln Highway cuts past the park.<sup>76</sup> One of the original iron tub-wheel turbines was discovered buried in the ground (probably where the shoot from the mill pond had been abandoned and buried) and is still on display outside the mill. The grounds around the mill were landscaped into a picturesque scene with flowerbeds, various trees, cut grass, and brick walkways. It was transformed into an aesthetically pleasing, quaint, and secluded county park; far different from its former industrial, busy, and probably well-worn exterior.<sup>77</sup> Benches, paths, trails, and bridges near the mill were added; many of the bricks used in reconstruction efforts were found on the site during restoration. Later, as time went on the park added the Sugar Shack, playgrounds, shelters, and various different cleared areas (ie the little known RC Flying Field).

The land where John Wood Elementary now stands was once John Wood's land. The land was supposedly some of which he purchased after the mill property, supposedly from the Potawatomi. The school was built in 1962 as the population of the area increased. Formerly, students attended the nearby Ainsworth School. Both continued to be open and functioning schools for some time until the older Ainsworth School was phased out of use and eventually sold, though as of the writing of this essay the old Ainsworth School still stands. John wood was

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<sup>76</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>. See also: Unknown Author. *Wood's Historic Grist Mill Brochure* (Unknown place of publication: Lake County Parks Department assumed publisher, Unknown date.). URL for PDF: <http://www.lakecountyparks.com/DocumentCenter/View/126/Woods-Historic-Grist-Mill-Brochure-PDF?bidId=>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

quickly expanded upon several times. Initially called John Wood-Ainsworth School, in shorthand written ‘Wood-Worth’ in newspapers, it eventually was just called John Wood School. Unfortunately, there was very little newspaper information about the naming process, property development, or the organization of the school in general.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout this time in the development of the park, it is important to note the role and immeasurable importance of Olive Wood, John Wood’s great-granddaughter, in helping to preserve and present the history of John Wood’s mill, the settlement of Woodvale, and the early days of Lake County. Olive Wood was an elementary and high school teacher who was educated at the teachers college at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. She taught at Deep River, Ainsworth, and Hobart schools before retiring. Olive Wood was also the first woman principal of Ross Township. Among the many subjects she taught were math, English, history, and Latin. She was a member of several teachers associations. Olive was very active in the Ross Historical Society and other early initiatives to preserve Lake County history, acting as a kind of head figure or leader in the first preservation acts in Lake County. She led many different initiatives focused on raising funds, awareness, and momentum for historical sites, public parks, and natural areas. She was at the dedication of Deep River Park, making comments and participating in pictures. Olive had lived in the ornately designed and decorated two-story home that still stands next to the park property; it is privately owned. She was constantly active in education initiatives, preserving local history, and various civic associations; continuing the spirit and ideals of her forefathers in a very literal sense. Olive Wood died on Nov. 3, 1983, at the age of 87, living to see her great-grandfather’s former pioneer settlement become a treasured public park.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> “Area Schools Will Have Open House.” *The Times*, Munster, IN. Nov. 11, 1962. See Also: “400 More Pupils in Ross Township.” *The Times*, Munster, IN. August 22, 1963.

<sup>79</sup> “Olive E. Wood.” Obituary. *The Time*, Munster, IN. Nov. 6, 1983. See Also: “Pioneer Spirit Stays Alive.” *The Times*, Munster, IN. July 2, 1978.

The property was finally approved by the Department of Interior and dedicated as a historical landmark on October 10th, 1976. John Wood's settlement and mill were formally re-opened to the citizens of Lake County as a county park and national historic site in May of 1977, named Deep River County Park.<sup>80</sup> In the early days of restoring the property it seems there had been plans to buy all of the old historic buildings, restore them, and open the area as an historic village with everything intact and presented as it might have looked in John Wood's time. Unfortunately, these plans were discussed and publicized, but never came to fruition as funding and interest in building the larger historical site never materialized. In the early 1990s, the Parks Dept bought the machinery and the inner workings of a mill in Virginia, which are still on display in the mill today. The saw-mill which sits on the property today is a working recreation of a kind of saw-mill that John Wood might have had in his time. It was built in the early 1990s as well with volunteer help, along with the Park Dept. Made in the old-style form of frontier-architecture, the mill is fastened together using only wooden pegs, no metal or iron bolts or screws. Many of the 300-350 pegs were made and also signed by local school children, the building of the saw-mill was a cherished community event.<sup>81</sup> As of the 2020s, the parks department owns Wood's Mill, most of the former property, Nathan Wood's historic brick home, and the former church (which is now the gift shop), but other homes and buildings in the area are privately owned.<sup>82</sup>

**Conclusion:** The overarching purpose of this examination was specifically to explore, understand, and obtain a better historical picture of John Wood, the Wood family, their Woodvale

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<sup>80</sup> Unknown Author. *Wood's Historic Grist Mill Brochure* (Unknown place of publication: Lake County Parks Department assumed publisher, Unknown date,). URL for PDF:

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<sup>81</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Passine, uploader. "Wood's Historic Grist Mill." Published on Vimeo. Published April 17, 2013. Running Time 9:51. URL: <https://vimeo.com/64264546>.

community, and the property that became Deep River County Park. Through analyzing a plethora of sources from primary first hand accounts, to old secondary books, to newspapers spanning a century, a more concrete historical picture of John Wood and his time period are able to come into view. The secondary objective was to place all known knowledge pertinent to the history of the family, mill, and park in one place with all known sources listed. An important final focus was developing a better understanding and appreciation for local Lake County history through examining the various sources and researching the lives and legacy of the Wood family. Doing so builds a better comprehension for American history in the period of early westward expansion in the old Northwest during the early 1800s. Using the specific historical site of the grist-mill and the history of the Wood family, it is possible to construct a robust and living image of the development of local, state, and national history.

It is important to understand that John Wood, his family, and the community he founded all need to be understood within the time period they lived. They developed in quintessential historical American fashion for the period: in the shadows of the revolution with revolutionary actors all around; during the expansion of the the colonies into the old Northwest; working-class on the East coast; witnessing firsthand the War of 1812 and various conflicts with the natives; immigrating to the frontier of Northwestern Indiana; owning a grist-mill and founding a settlement; experiencing the the Civil War as an American patriot family of Union soldiers; witnessing the transition from antiquated forms of economic production into fascinating new technologies and forms of production. John Wood became the man he was, evolving with the historical development of the county, imbedded with the ideals of the times he lived. In short John Wood was: the son of a revolutionary minuteman; a master-tanner; a militia cavalry soldier; a husband; a father; a farmer; a frontier surveyor; a frontier pioneer; a master-miller; a

community founder; an anti-slavery, pro-Union, Free-Soil Party member, and later a Lincoln Republican; a master-FreeMason; a business entrepreneur; a temperance leader; founder of a community and county; and the *raison d'être* of Deep River County Park and the namesake of John Wood Elementary School in the Merrillville School Corporation.

The Woodvale community John Wood built was a reflection of the society he wanted to build within the new framework and freedoms of the experimental American republic. John Wood had left the East coast to start anew, to build that which he believed in based on his upbringing and his ideals, to find that idealized freedom for which we all yearn. He began a new craft, settled an area, reared a family, and built a community. His community of Woodvale was closely linked to his ideas and beliefs: a place of business and trade, a point of common gathering, a church which represented his liberal religious beliefs, a school taught by educated citizens, free of liquor establishments; in many ways it was a hamlet of patriotic New England ideals in the last frontier of Indiana.

Almost 250 years after Moses Wood helped found this county at the Battle of Lexington, almost 200 years since John Wood settled the area, and about 150 years after Nathan Wood built the still-standing red-brick grist-mill, modern day families can leisurely relax in the picturesque park and learn about American history through the history of John Wood, the Wood family, and their settlement at Deep River. The park and the history of the family act as the perfect medium through which to study the period of settlement of the old Northwest. His family's long story weaves in and out of the various aspects of American history, culture, and society and is quintessential of the American experience throughout this period. The impact of his momentous life and extraordinary work can still be seen in John Wood Elementary School and in Deep River County Park. Both stand as public historical monuments to not only a man and family, but to

early American frontier republicanism, the democratic spirit, and to a time when Lake County, Indiana, was still considered the frontier. It should go without saying that the residents of Lake County are truly blessed to have such a beautifully scenic park and well-kept public gathering space as Deep River. Citizens throughout the county should know its long and vibrant history; and hopefully in doing so will further support, fund, and visit the park; take the tours of the property and mill; and ask questions. But most importantly, hopefully this inspires citizens to get involved by learning more, volunteering, and working to preserve the history in their local area; because if we don't remember, we are doomed to forget!

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