

## **Newaygo Says Goodbye to Rowe Manufacturing Co.**

(Newaygo Republican newspaper, year unknown)

Newaygo is saying goodbye to one of its most picturesque buildings. The Rowe Manufacturing Company, so long a part of the Newaygo story, is being demolished.

Snug against the banks of the Muskegon River, where the Pennoyer Creek cascades into the river, the plant stood for some one hundred years, really a testimony to one man's achievement.

Henry Rowe came to Newaygo in 1905 with \$10 in his pocket, toting a typewriter. He had been associated with Berkey & Gay in Grand Rapids, furniture makers. He heard someone in Newaygo had a dowel machine for sale, and he had fallen in love with Newaygo.

Rowe found the man, paid \$10 down with a promise to pay the rest, a total of \$50 in all, and so had part of the machinery for his dreamed of factory.

The Rowe plant was incorporated in June, 1905. The basic building had belonged to the Portland Cement Company and the output of energy from the creek also was part of the Cement Company holdings.

Pennoyer Creek was important to the new industry. It turned a big turbine under the plant producing 100 horsepower.

At the closing of the plant in 1967 this same water power still produced 50% of the power used.

Rowe Manufacturing sent out into the world more than forty varieties of wood parts. Also, school benches and factory benches were made in the plant. One of the big outputs was all types of wooden spindles, door knobs, drawer pulls, decorate rosettes, some cleverly designed with sheaves of wheat or floral patterns.

Puerto Rico and Cuba bought many shipments of wooden paddles used in sugar plantations.

Agricultural bushings for slow moving machinery were made by Rowe. Even at the close of the plant orders were still coming in from Ford for tractor parts. Wood shift handles were made by the plant for the automotive industry.

Rowe was known for his quick wit. During World War I, he had in his employ a German watchman who "watched" everything that was going on. Rowe was making wooden plugs for shells for the allies. The floor was often littered with these plugs.

The watchman asked Rowe, "What are you going to do with these plugs, who are they for?"

Rowe told him, "They are for the Germans."

The pleased the watchman who walked away smiling but returned to ask, "How will you get them to Germany? You know the English have the channel blocked."

Rowe told him, "This is very easy. We ship them to France and they shoot them over."

In 1914 the new plant was built but it was to have a short life. In 1915 a workman got a hot splinter in his hand and part of that same splinter somehow nested in a pile of sawdust. The resulting fire burned the new plant, even setting two barns and a house afire across the river.

Rowe was undaunted and moved into the present plant. This was an old red building which he had refinished in the white aluminum siding that has made it such a landmark. This last bit of re-doing took place in 1940,

The plant bought high grade lumber, drying it in its kilns and storing it in a large steam heated warehouse.

Starting with only six employees, the plant used 20 to 30 men during its busy years at Newaygo.

In 1964 Henry Rowe died. He was 90 years old. He died suddenly in his sleep after a full day's work and an evening out which included dinner at White Cloud.

During his running of the plant he saw the installation of two more power sources, steam and electricity.

He built his dream into a busy enterprise known throughout the world and giving Newaygo one of its best known attractions.

A bit about Henry Rowe from his 11.19.1964 Newaygo Republican newspaper obituary:

"Everyone knew Mr. Rowe for he loved people and they enjoyed his dry humor. He was an entertaining conversationalist whether reminiscing about the past or discussion present day subjects."

"Mr. Rowe was a self-made man. He was born in very modest surroundings October 1, 1874 in Hastings (Michigan). At the age of 18 he was selling step ladders from door to door in Grand Rapids (Michigan). He always wanted to own his own business. Previous to coming to Newaygo to establish his factory in 1905, Mr. Rowe and his brother owned a similar one in Allegan (Michigan). He built a new factory in 1915 by the present Newaygo Engineering Company, occupying it just eight months when it burned to the ground. At that time, the Henry Rowe Mfg. Co. moved back to its previous location where it is still located."

"Mr. Rowe was village president from 1926 to 1928 and served six years on the village council. He also was a member of the Chamber of Commerce."

"He married Della Mae Minthorn June 2, 1913 at Lake City (Michigan)."

Newaygo Republican, 6.25.1931

Henry Rowe Mfg. Co. Gets Big Toy Order

"...Henry Rowe Mfg. Co. has felt the heavy hand of the business depression, things perked up considerably last week through receipt of one of the largest orders in the company's history."

"...calls for the manufacture of approximately 200,000 toy novelties, involving considerable work and a large quantity of material and Mr. Rowe states that the contract will keep a full force employed until the first of the year."

**Newaygo Republican, 7.27, 1905:**

#### **The Factory Starts**

The Henry Rowe Mfg. Co. has started its factory and has made several shipments the past week. Six persons are now employed and more will be added to the force as fast as needed. The service of Mr. W. A. Fessenden of Bellaire has been secured; he will have charge of the automatic turning machines. He will, no doubt, move his family to Newaygo.

The company makes dowel pins and rods, automatic turnings, mouldings, etc. It appears that an industry has been started in Newaygo which will in time furnish employment to at least a fair number of men.

Mr. Rowe has had considerable experience in his line of business. For several years he conducted a similar business under the name of the Furniture City Dowel Co. in a part of the factory of the Bissell Carpet Sweeper Co. of Grand Rapids. He later organized the Rowe Bros. Mfg. Co. at Allegan with a paid in capital stock of \$10,000. He secured for the company a bonus of \$2,000 for the city.

A modern factory was erected of blocks made of Newaygo Portland cement. The business increased under Mr. Rowe's management and within nine months the company was employing seventeen men. Mr. Rowe's brother is now manager of the Rowe Bros. Mfg. Co. He stated recently to the Allegan Press that the business is still increasing and that twenty men are now being employed. While Mr. Rowe still retains an interest in the Allegan company, he is devoting his energy to the welfare of the business he is establishing in Newaygo. He says he is very much pleased with the advantages the company has here and with the present outlook for business, he is confident that the company will succeed in establishing a business of considerable importance to the town.

A fire in 1967 put the firm out of business. The fire burned off the top of an elevator and the state condemned the other elevator. Repairs would have been too costly.

Clair Rowe associated with his father since he can remember, and still a Newaygo resident, stated he still feel bad over the closing of the plant but stated, "Like all things, it served its era and that era has drawn to a close."

Clair still gets orders for the Rowe wooden parts. The 100 year old building will soon be gone. Clair said the family has sold their stock and he has no idea really who will be doing what with the land or the buildings.

Memories, only memories, will soon remain of an enterprise that helped to make the little village in the valley on the busy rushing Muskegon River shores, a world renowned center for the very best in wooden parts for just about everything.