

Novi Sawmill, A Reminder Of Early Pioneer Days

By W. W. EDGAR
Observer Roving Editor

There is no neon sign to identify the fact, there isn't even a marker at the entrance. But you'll find one of the most interesting business establishments in the state on 12-Mile Road, just a bit east of Novi. It is the Novi Sawmill & Lumber Company, one of the last links with the pioneer days of Michigan when lumbering was the main occupation as the early settlers cleared the land to establish homes.

"There are only a few of us left," Ray LaFond, one of the two partners, explained with considerable pride. "As a matter of fact I don't know of any in Wayne County -- unless the Road Commission may have one."

The grey-haired goat with the lack of the outdoorsman, glanced around the yard and mill where a large 54-inch saw had just sliced off a huge tree trunk, and admitted that he finally was being squeezed by the encroaching development of subdivisions.

"We've been at this location for 25 years," he said, "and prior to that we were on the corner of Haegergy Road where the golf club now is located. There was a lot of timber

around then -- but it is fast disappearing."

"We now go as far as 25 miles to obtain our lumber," he said, "and at present we are working in the Kensington Park area."

HOW DO THEY go about clearing a wooded area?

"Do the lumbermen just enter the woods and cut down every tree in sight, with no regard for size or variety?"

"In their task just one of clearing the land?"

"Oh, no," LaFond stated with considerable emphasis.

"We do what is called select cutting. The State Forester marks the trees that are to be removed. We follow up and cut them down."

"What do we haul them to their location and saw them up for both wholesale and retail sales?"

He pointed out that it was actually a saw mill and that no finished lumber was produced. It is just rough cut and the furniture manufacturers and builders do the rest.

At one point he was standing close to seven large pieces of tree trunk that were about four feet in diameter.

"Would you believe it?" he said, "These pieces all came from one tree -- over in South-

field. It was white oak and was about 70 feet high when it was cut down."

Just then a housewife entered and inquired about the price of sawdust.

When she left he returned and said:

"Yes, we use every bit of the log. There is a great market for sawdust."

"It is used for mulch around shrubs. It also is used for sawdust bedding when you have a pet."

In great demand at the various schools and colleges for use in the pits for such events as the high jump and pole vault.

"We even sell a lot of it to big industries," LaFond explained, "where they use it in the tumbling machines."

ASIDE from producing long

planks of various sizes and the old mill and its operator,

there also is a market for lumbering as an engineering stakes and wedges that are used in the foundries for shipping.

"And the bark of the trees also is finding its way into landscaping," he added. "It not only is decorative but keeps down the weeds."

What would cause a man of his age (he's 59) to devote his career to the age-old lumbering trade in the face of diminishing timberland?

"Well," he answered with a smile, "in my earliest years I managed an apartment in the city, along with my mother."

"After while my health failed and the doctor ordered me to look for some kind of outdoor activity."

"I met up with Ken Bassett out here and we started the sawmill. That was years and years ago and I think we are one of the few original owners of any business in the Novi area."

How much longer did he think he could continue business at the old stand?

"I'll be here as long as I can," he said, "for I sure have enjoyed it. But I'm also looking for the time when I can go fishing."

"We haven't made a fortune, but we've had a lot of fun," he added, "because you can get away almost any time you want."

THEN, half apologetically, he added:

"I'm going to take my mother to our place at Indian River this afternoon. She wants to see the start of the color season and I'm going squirrel hunting."

It is a rare combination --

the old mill and its operator; it is a rare track to the days when lumbering was the state's outstanding industry.

Many an unusual person came out of the logging camps, but few more interesting than Ray LaFond, the man who quit a career as an apartment manager to devote his life to lumber cutting.

If you're interested in a link with the past, drive out 12-Mile Road -- just a bit short of Novi.

But don't look for any such things as neon signs, and you could easily drive past the place. But the old sawmill is a worthwhile place to stop.

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Judge Michael J. Hand

The case load of the new District Court, based on the experience of the existing Justice and Municipal Courts will be divided into approximately 55% criminal and 45% civil. A very high percentage of the criminal misdemeanor cases will be minor traffic offenses. Of the more serious traffic offenses and other misdemeanors, less than 5% would be cases in which probation is available or indicated, yet the other candidate for District Court has concentrated all of his advertisements on this item as if there were no other business of the court.

During his terms as Municipal Judge, Judge Hand has not referred eligible probation cases to the Oakland County Probation Office because there are only two officers to handle well over a thousand cases. Instead, in cases where probation was indicated, he has checked the misdemeanant's background and placed him under the probationary supervision of the court.

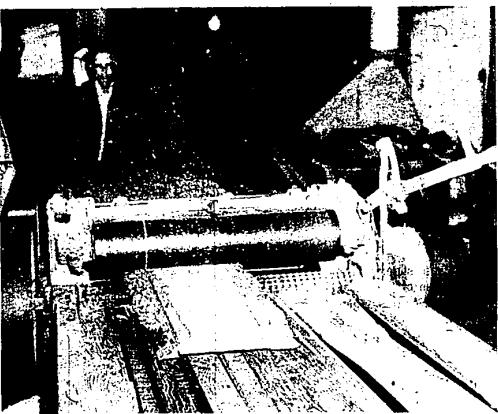
The new District Court Bill provides an excellent opportunity to install and implement an effective probation department which can be assisted by volunteer civilian help, and it is Judge Hand's intention to use the machinery thus provided.

Keep an able **HAND** on the gavel.

Sponsored by the Committee To Elect Hand District Judge.

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PAUSING — Ken Bassett and Ray LaFond with some of their stock outside the Novi Sawmill.



TRIMS — Ray LaFond operates the trimmer to whittle down a plank.



SPLIT — Ken Bassett watches as the saw bites into a log.

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Farmington Adult Education Department will offer ski instruction again this year. Classes are scheduled to begin Nov. 15 or 16, with the initial sessions to be held at Farmington High School, and the remaining nights at Mt. Brighton. Applications will be accepted until Nov. 9 at the school administration building, 32300 Shiawasse, Farmington, or may be made in person at the first session.

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