

Fleetwood Area Historical Society Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The Society expects to have a small stand at the Fleetwood Community Carnival to be held July 18 – 24. We plan to have a slide display and promote both new memberships and the 2023 Anniversary Celebration. Please stop by and check us out. Remind others that our dues are low and their membership support is needed. We also continue to search for new volunteers to help with the day-to-day managing of the Society each Monday morning.

At this time, we expect to return to monthly membership meetings and programs to be held in our meeting room beginning the third Wednesday in September (Sept. 15) at 7 PM. We will present a program of slide scans of the 1923, 1948, and 1973 (50th, 75th and 100th) anniversary celebrations. Tentative plans for our October 20th meeting are for a presentation by Arthur Counts about Fleetwood in 1800 including maps from that time.

A refurbished Canon copier has recently been installed to replace our old copier for which replacement parts were no longer available.

I presented a program about Fleetwood's anniversary celebrations through historic photographs for both the Fleetwood Library and for the Villa at Fleetwood. Both were well received.

Plans continue for a book of historic photographs of the Fleetwood area to be published in time to celebrate the town's 150th anniversary in 2023. The Fleetwood Council of

Community Organizations (F.C.C.O.) has taken an interest in the project and meetings on the subject will continue to be held.

We wish to thank the Virginville Grange for their very generous donation of \$250.00 which was presented to us at their May meeting.

The board of directors, in May, approved a donation to the Borough of Fleetwood for help in replacing the bandshell in the park which was razed due to safety concerns from deterioration. We urge others to consider such donations which the borough will hold in a separate account until replacement plans and funds are available. Meanwhile a large tent has been erected to enable programs to be held with lights and sound. A very successful car show was held in the park in June by the Fleetwood Rotary Club, using the tent arrangement for the first time.

The board also agreed to place some of our duplicate high school yearbooks in the Fleetwood Library. We hope the donors would agree to that loan.

Look for our sign in front of the community center for the opening of the Museum on the second Sunday of each month as we make plans to begin such openings once again.

*With warm regards,
Bill Strause*

F.M.BROWN'S SONS

A NEW LOOK

The large concrete grain silo with the words F.M.Brown's Sons which used to greet all who entered Fleetwood from West Main St. is now a thing of the past. The company, in March, began the demolition of silos no longer needed for their business or which had reached beyond the normal life span for concrete silos and become unsafe.

When I spoke, in late March, to Mr. Frank Brown, manager of the Fleetwood mill since the retirement of Harold Brown in 1980, he told me that a surprising number of 34 silos were being demolished. Most of the silos coming down were small ones of about 15 ft. in diameter. Some had not been used in years and some held corn, oats, soybeans and barley which the Fleetwood location will no longer be buying. Safety had also become an issue as the older silos deteriorated.



These smaller silos had been built around 1955 and, in the meanwhile, much larger silos had been erected on their property closer to the railroad. Except for the two next to Main St., most of the older silos were 15 ft. in diameter and 50 ft. tall, built in groupings of 4. In contrast, there are 8 newer silos which are 30 ft. in diameter and 100 ft. in height. Behind them are two which are 50 ft. in diameter and 100 ft. high.



The Fleetwood location will now concentrate its efforts on the business of making flour and is referred to as the flour division.

F.M.Brown's Sons buys soft red wheat locally and elsewhere which it grinds into flour.

The silo storage capacity for wheat, which had at about 900,000 bushels is currently at about 750,000 bushels. The plant, on the other hand, uses 1.8 million to 2.0 million bushels each year, so wheat must be brought in after the local growing season is over. In addition to wheat from local farmers, the firm buys wheat from Maryland, Delaware and other areas. Most comes in by trailer trucks but some arrives in railroad cars. At various times you may have noticed a line-up of trailer trucks in front of St. Paul's Union cemetery in Churchtown, waiting for their wheat to be sample-tested and unloaded. Some storage capacity is available in the Delaware region where wheat is stored until after the growing season has ended and is later delivered to Fleetwood.

The company has four trailer trucks, specially designed for hauling flour to customers. The flour can be off-loaded using a pneumatic system which can deliver the flour directly into customers' storage

facilities. The mill has enough grinding capacity to fill 8 trailer truck loads each day.

Considering that wheat prices can range from 5 to 7 dollars per bushel, with the plant using close to 2 million bushels a year, it is obvious that the Fleetwood Flour Division is a very big business and is going strong today. Removal of silos was not, in any way, related to a change in business.

Soft, red wheat is planted in the fall. This winter wheat germinates and produces seedlings within several weeks which then lie dormant through the winter months. As spring arrives, the wheat begins to mature with harvests in early summer.

Flour from soft, red, winter wheat is not used to make bread, but is used largely for making pretzels, other snacks and cookies. Another use is for bread crumbs and one customer uses Fleetwood flour to make animal crackers.

The F.M. Brown's Sons sales market is largely the Reading and Lancaster area where a major market exists in the pretzel industry. The market extends generally to a 90-minute drive from Fleetwood.

Now that the firm will no longer be buying corn and other grains, the gas dryer at the Fleetwood location, has also been demolished. The wheat purchased, must continue to meet standards for moisture and contaminates before it can be off-loaded at the mill.

The Fleetwood site is known as the Flour Division. Other locations are in Birdsboro, which concentrates on animal feed, and Sinking Spring which sells bird seed, pet food and grass seed. A location on Lancaster Ave. in Reading which dealt in fuel oil and coal, was recently sold by the company. In addition, the company owns a former dairy farm in Douglasville which now is used primarily for growing crops such as corn and wheat.

The steel roller mill now owned and operated by F.M. Brown's Sons has a long history in Fleetwood, dating back to 1866 when it was built by Lewis Wanner and Joel and William Schaeffer and was known as the Schaeffer Wanner Company. It was one of the best equipped flour mills in the country with a capacity of 125 barrels of flour per day.

In addition to the manufacture of flour, the company gradually added the sale of lumber, feed and coal. By 1930 the sole owners were the elderly Llewellyn and Warren Schaeffer.

For various reasons, by 1974 the flour mill had ceased production and the feed and coal business had decreased considerably. The mill fell into disrepair.

On the other hand, during this time, the F.M. Brown's Sons business had been growing from a little grist mill in Amity Township to very successful mills in Birdsboro, Shillington and Sinking Spring.

In 1946 a fire completely destroyed the Sinking Spring flour mill. Rather than rebuild the burned-out mill, the Browns elected to buy the Fleetwood Eagle Roller Mill for \$25,000. This sale, in 1947, ended the existence of the Schaeffer, Wanner Co.

George Brown's oldest son Harold was transferred to Fleetwood and managed the business until his retirement in 1981 when Frank Brown assumed management of the Fleetwood mill.

The company completely refurbished the Fleetwood Mill, eliminating the outdated and crumbling steam boiler and converted all operations to electricity. Storage capacity was gradually added, and thus many of the silos currently being demolished were built during the 1950s.

Frank Brown indicated that there were no immediate plans for the use of the site following removal of the silos, except for truck parking.

Fleetwood is fortunate to have this large flourishing business not only as a boost to the area economy but also as a convenient market for area wheat farmers. We wish them continued success in the future.

-bob knoll

A new batch of Apple Butter is on sale at the Museum. Price is \$3.00 per pint

Fleetwood Area Historical Society

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