



Oldest Plantation Yields Sawlogs

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Pines set out in 1876, and long unmanaged, have undergone their first harvest. Here's an account of the Walter Ware plantation at Hancock—and of significant history that paralleled its growth.

Wisconsin's oldest pine plantation has yielded its first, though long delayed, harvest. Over 25,000 board feet of sawlogs were taken from 7 acres of land. Eighty thousand feet of timber on this small tract are left to grow into larger trees.

This Waushara county plantation, located 4 miles northwest of Hancock, has been known for over three-quarters of a century as the Walter Ware plantation. Planting began in 1869 and was completed in 1876 by Walter Ware, who declared in that year to his neighbors that it represented his own personal idea of celebrating the centennial year of the Declaration of Independence. "Looking forward," he said, "is even more important than looking backward on the 100th anniversary of the nation." The year 1961 marked the 85th for most of the pines in the plantation.

During this long period a succession of owners did nothing to thin and improve the plantation. The present owner, Floyd Foster, Hancock, requested the assistance of the Conservation Department in marking those

trees which should be taken out in a combination harvest-timber stand improvement cut. Alex Katovich, district forester, marked the trees, and assisted Mr. Foster in making contacts with local timber operators. The marked timber was cut in April, 1961, and the logs were trucked to a sawmill in Wautoma.

While printed records of the plantation are rare, the many young people who helped Mr. Ware in the spring and summer of 1876 gave oft-repeated stories to their children and grandchildren, so that a fairly sharp word-picture of how the plantation was established has been preserved.

The mother of the late Mrs. Shirley Barnes of Hancock was one of the teenagers who helped, and Mrs. Barnes had a clear recollection of her mother's description of the enterprise.

Walter Ware had left a stony New Hampshire farm in 1856 for the level, stone-free sands of western Waushara county. By 1876 he had learned that keeping fertility in sandy soil was an elusive thing. The plantation area was even then called an "old field."



This was one of the larger pines in the Ware plantation.

Less than 2 miles west was the boggy margin of the famous Leola marsh. On its border were great, open-grown, limby white and Norway pines. On slight rises seed from these trees had germinated and taken root. Because this soil was constantly moist and loose it was easy to pull the tree seedlings with little injury to the roots.

A yoke of oxen, a large "stone boat" (a flat, wheel-less dray), and a half-dozen youngsters barely in their teens, with Walter Ware the woods boss, constituted the equipment, the power, and the crew.

Planting of the trees began in the spring, but unlike the intensive, short planting season of today, it was carried on well into the summer, so that in fact some of the trees were reported to have been planted on Independence Day. This should not be surprising, for a good deal of the marsh duff was brought along to protect the roots on their slow journey to the planting area. The indistinct but definite pattern of rows today indicates that Walter Ware went about his tree-planting project in a systematic way.

Mr. Ware moved from the Hancock community in 1888 to a location near Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he died in 1900. A number of his descendants are reported to be living in the Midwest, but so far as is known, none in Wisconsin.

This man-made forest has been a contemporary of many of the important resource exploitations of the Glacial Lake Wisconsin area, of which it is a part. Some were for good, some for evil—carried on by ambitious men as this young forest grew into pine trees that tower nearly a hundred feet into the sky.

Over its small trees, the rear-guard flights of passenger pigeons, in ever-increasing numbers, took place as adult birds built their nests on the broad, horizontal limbs of great pine trees in the marsh border, and took flight to the oak-studded terminal moraine 4 miles to the east for their staple food, the acorns.

Planted trees had "closed in" and produced a soft, clean-bed of needles when the steam dredges gashed long trenches in Leola marsh to the west. Drained of its waters which had sustained the pines and the tamaracks in summer droughts, the marsh duff

turned to tinder. Fires burned the very roots from the trees, some younger, some older, than the seedlings which had been rescued for the Ware plantation.

They witnessed the influx of prairie chicken as grass carpeted the often-burned marsh. They saw the decline of this same species of grouse to the point where Leola is one of the few last marshes in Wisconsin upon which the booming of the prairie chicken can be heard.

A new type of farm experiment station, dedicated primarily to learning how to till sandy soils successfully, was established by the College of Agriculture at Hancock when the pines were 40-year-old pole timbers. Experimental shelterbelts of pine trees have been consistently identified with this experiment station throughout its history.

Tree belts for sandy soils in the control of wind erosion were put to their real tests when Walter Ware's plantation was barely 60 years. The dust storms of the early 30's in central Wisconsin gave a rise to the state's own shelterbelt program. Test belts at Hancock, including the state's first and longest white pine belt planted in 1927 by Michael and Edward O'Connor east of Hancock on the famous goose refuge, were by then showing the way. At the end of World War II upwards of 2,000 miles of tree belts formed a network of wind barriers in five of the counties which share the bed of ancient Glacial Lake Wisconsin.

Sawlog-sized timbers were in the

Ware plantation when machines arrived to make tree-planting easier. Within a stone's throw of the very trail along which Walter Ware's oxen plodded with their stone-boat loads of pine seedling, at least one of Wau-shara county's first two planting machines worked its underriggings to a glistening polish in the spring of 1944.

The pine trees remaining after the first harvest are still young, if we accept Aldo Leopold's ear-marks of an old tree: "May after May (these) pines follow their candles skyward, each headed straight for the zenith, if only there be years enough before the last trumpet blows. It is a very old pine who at last forgets which of its many candles is the most important, and thus flattens its head against the sky." These pines have by no means forgotten. Each year you will find a single dominant candle at the top.

Still young, but they are pine trees mindful of the future. Natural re-seeding has begun. It will take a 16-foot pole to reach the leading candle on some of those second generation trees. This light harvest is their salvation. With more sunlight they, too, will make more growth.

As still other young seedlings find their place in the sun, a many-aged forest emerges. It is the kind that will permit more frequent cuts—harvest of the net growth of woods produced in intervening years.

After 85 years, and generally neglected, the Walter Ware plantation has acquired the stature of a saw-timber forest.



Sizable trees remain after logging. Note that stumps are cut low to minimize waste.