

***The Walter Wood Law Office/Post Office:
Documenting an Early Structure***

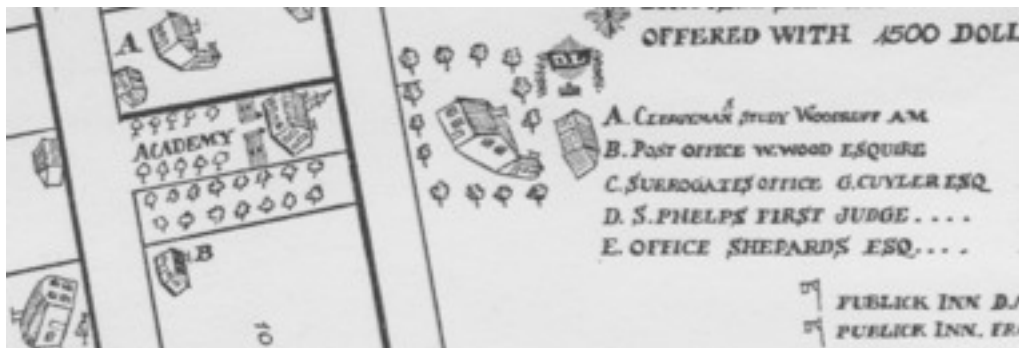
The history of this small structure was, in a sense, preserved because of a mistake. Walter Wood, an early and prominent Aurora resident, was a lawyer and judge, and then-future President Millard Fillmore received his early education in law from Wood. The 1904 Atlas of Cayuga County, in describing “Glenheim,” (Leffingwell House) added on these notes:

Nearby is a small building, which a century ago [i.e. ca. 1804] was the law office of Judge Walter Wood, and here Millard Fillmore...first began the study of law. On the same premises...is one of the oldest houses in the village. It was the birthplace of Hon. Edwin B. Morgan in 1806, and the upper floor served for several years previous to 1816 as the Masonic Lodge. [the Chimney Corner]

However, in 1811, dismayed by loss of the county seat to Auburn, Wood moved to Montville. It was there that he offered education to young Millard Fillmore, although he dismissed him later for pleading a case before Wood felt he was ready. Fillmore then went to *East* Aurora to practice law. This was all clearly stated in his autobiography, but the Aurora/East Aurora confusion lasts to this day.

On May 25, 1902, Dr. Albert Leffingwell mentioned in his diary being given an “ancient” cupboard with pigeonholes by “Henry” (from context, plausibly Henry A. Morgan, son of E. B.) and putting it in the office where Fillmore studied. In a marginal note (undated) he corrected it: “Fillmore never here.”

However, Walter Wood did have an office in Aurora, because he was the first postmaster for the (then) town of Scipio, appointed 1795. This building is shown on the 1805 map of Aurora, letter B, “Post Office W Wood Esquire”:



The location is right across from the present-day Lyon House, and at some point it was moved to the north (lot A, approximately). Rick Lazarus has observed that the proposed office building is old, somewhat modified, and was likely moved, based on foundation and later chimney style.

The lot to which it was moved was that on which in 1827 Eleazer Burnham built the house later bought by Dr. Leffingwell. Burnham, also a lawyer, worked with Walter Wood and married

Wood's daughter Caroline. (Walter and Paulina Mosher Wood had ten children, all but one of whom survived to adulthood. His will is reputed to have taken 93 years to sort out fully.) And guess who was the second postmaster of Aurora, appointed 1812? Eleazer Burnham.

So when was the post office moved? I would guess that Burnham moved it to his lot around the time he built his house, 1827. That was certainly in an era when stoves could be transported to Aurora by water, and the present chimney is the type that was used with stoves. Burnham also built the brick building across the street (that used to be Jane Morgan's Little House) as an office. It seems likely that that was his law office and the little frame building continued as the post office.

Around the time that he bought Burnham's house in 1896, Leffingwell embarked on a massive project to refurbish the house, repair the barns, and add the present porch, all while moving in. During this time, he noted in his diary moving his books into "Burnham's office." There is no record that Leffingwell ever owned the brick office across the street, so this would appear to refer to the Walter Wood building.

As noted, this is an ongoing investigation, a lot of it through Leffingwell's diary (extremely interesting and informative about the scandals of yesteryear, by the way). Such work is detailed and laborious, and involves some guesswork, particularly in connecting the "Millard Fillmore tradition" to the first post office. However, all these steps so far are at least plausible, and work continues.