

## L.T. Wood Company

*By attorney David Ware, who grew up in Manchester. Dave refers to the L.T. Wood news brief in one of our Historical Society e-newsletters, and refers to it in the story. See the 1919 clipping at right.*

I worked for Mr. Wood in the ice plant on Bissell Street during the five summers of 1969-1973. It was a great experience, and I have lots of L.T. Wood stories! He was quite the character, and he touched many lives in some very positive ways. The newspaper clip you included this week describes Mr. Wood's early days in the ice business, when he was still cutting ice from ponds and lakes. When Mr. Wood died in the summer of 1973, I believe he still owned ponds – or at least the ice-harvesting rights on ponds – in various areas of the state, even though he had been manufacturing ice in the ice plant on Bissell Street for many decades.

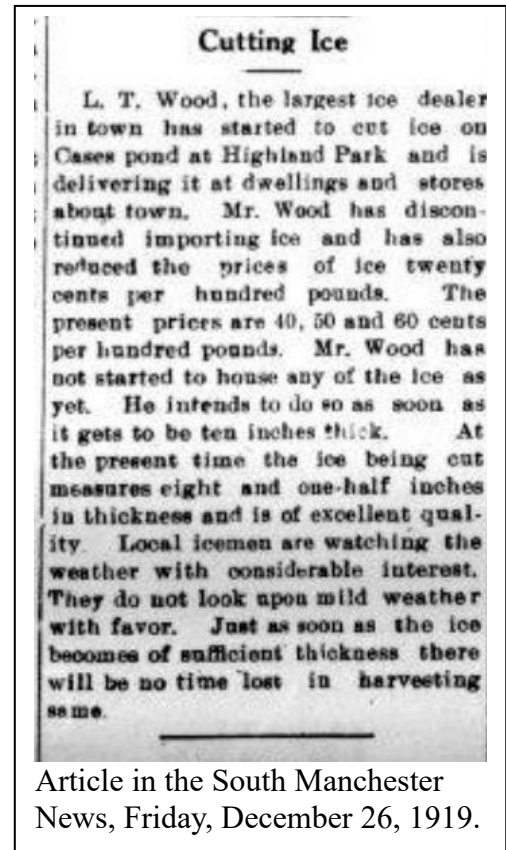
When I graduated from college in the spring of 1973, I returned to Manchester to work for the summer at L.T. Wood Company. It would be my last summer at the ice plant, since I would be attending UConn Law School in the fall, and I would be looking for law-related employment or internships during the summers of my coming law school years. The first day I reported for work at the ice plant that summer, I learned that Mr. Wood's son, Lee, had died earlier in the spring. Mr. Wood was heartbroken, and his own health had declined markedly, perhaps in part due to the heavy grief he suffered over the loss of his namesake son. He was only rarely coming to the office.

Soon, it became clear that Mr. Wood was dying. He called the office one day and asked me to come to see him at his house. I dutifully jumped into the old company pick-up truck and drove to see the old man. When I got to the house, he was literally on his death bed. He told me that he knew he wouldn't live much longer, that all of his affairs were in order, and that when he was gone, he hoped I would be helpful to Mrs. Wood. Of course, I promised that I would. He also said that when he died, Connecticut Bank and Trust would be responsible for selling the company, and so, he asked me for another promise: As soon as he was gone, he wanted his name, L.T. Wood, removed from the building on Bissell Street. I made him this promise as well.

Somebody – I don't recall who – called me at home on a Saturday evening not long after my visit with Mr. Wood, to tell me that he had passed. And so, early the next morning, before the busy Sunday morning stream of customers began arriving to buy their camping and picnicking ice needs, I went to Bissell Street. I leaned an extension ladder against the front of the building, and carefully began removing the letters – from left to right – returning to the ground with each one in turn, until my promise to Mr. Wood had been fulfilled.

As for the other promise I made, there were indeed some chores and errands that I was pleased to perform for Mrs. Wood following Mr. Wood's death, and while I don't recall the details of those tasks, I will always remember the kindness that Mrs. Wood showed toward me at that difficult time. You see, she knew that I was about to begin law school in the fall, and she asked about my plans. When I told her that I had found a little apartment in Hartford not far from the law school, she wanted to know whether I had furniture for the place. When I told her that furniture was the next thing I needed to consider, she insisted – happily – that I should let myself into the small house that she and Mr. Wood owned on Johnson Terrace, around the corner from the ice plant, and help myself to any furniture or furnishings they had been storing there. At first I demurred, but then gratefully accepted her generous offer and outfitted my very first apartment with a few items from that house.

With only weeks remaining before I was to begin my legal studies, representatives from Connecticut Bank and Trust came to Bissell Street to tour and learn about the business that they would be selling. After explaining the business, reviewing records, and answering questions to the best of my ability, the bank's representatives asked if I would accept a position as general manager of the company, pending its sale. I was surprised, humbled, and honored, but my law school plans were firm, and so, with gratitude for their confidence



Article in the South Manchester News, Friday, December 26, 1919.

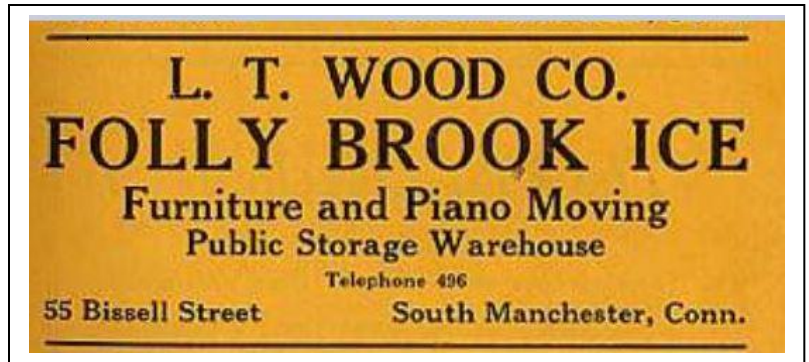
in me, I declined the offer and began my law school years in the small apartment where the kitchen table had been provided by the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. L.T. Wood.

*Dave also commented on this advertisement in the 1927 town directory*

Interesting advertisement. If I'm not mistaken, Folly Brook runs in the vicinity of Wetherell Street and Manchester Community College. It could be that Mr. Wood had the rights to cut ice over there, before he began manufacturing ice. Perhaps identifying the ice as having come locally from Folly Brook was a way to make his ice more appealing to his customers. At some point, Mr. Wood made the transition from cutting natural ice to manufacturing ice in a plant.

I believe Mr. Wood graduated from Yale with a degree in mathematics, perhaps in the 19-teens. The technology for making ice had been evolving for some time, and I believe the equipment at Mr. Wood's plant on Bissell Street came from a Texas-based company that had its start making ice for the refrigeration of beef that was being transported from slaughterhouses. I believe the technology used at Mr. Wood's plant when I worked there in the 1960s and 1970s was the original technology from when the plant was built (and it might still be used there today). As a general overview, the process involves the circulation of compressed ammonia as a refrigerant. The compressed ammonia circulates through a network of pipes inside a large pool of brine water. The cold pipes cool the brine down below 32 degrees. Across the top of the large pool of brine is a grid from which are hung large metal tanks filled with clean water – imagine big ice cube trays about two feet wide and four feet tall hanging down from the grid into the below-freezing-temperature brine, so the water in the big tanks freezes into big "ice cubes." When lifted from the grid with an overhead crane and dipped into another smaller tank of fresh clean water to free them up, they are tipped so that the large "cubes," i.e., 300-pound cakes of ice, slide out and are ready to be either made into crushed ice or cut into cubes.

We know that Mr. Wood never "put all of his eggs in one basket," i.e., his business strategy was to operate several kinds of businesses. So, it doesn't surprise me that the 1927 advertisement depicts a moving and storage business, as well as an ice business. At the time that I was working there, he had the ice business and the heating oil business. We used to comment that he had an elegantly simply approach: Keep 'em cool in the summer, and keep 'em warm in the winter! Smart, those Yalies!



*Left, ad in the 1969 From Your Neighbor's Kitchen recipe booklet. Right, retail meat market, circa 1969. From Town Historian and e-newsletter editor, Susan Barlow.*