

A Community Gathering Place

by Bill Sauers

Every community or neighborhood has a gathering place. Over time many come and go, they may change hands or change their name, but eventually something happens and the old place becomes nothing but a memory to the local old timers. Then there are places like the Dutch Mill at Dewey and Stone Roads that seem like they were always there and always will be, but maybe not!

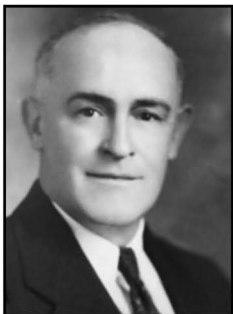
Back in 1928 Leon Cox, who helped organize the Barnard Fire Department, and his wife, Bertha, opened a hotdog stand. Leon constructed a windmill to use as an ornament on the stand. Bertha thought Old Mill would be a good name for their business while Leon suggested Dutch Mill. Drawing straws resulted in Leon's choice and the Dutch Mill opened with the windmill on top of the small building.

In 1932, with the end of Prohibition, the Coxes added a bar to sell beer and liquor. Then came a \$10,000 addition. Eventually the place was sold to Donald Hall, Thomas Brierly Sr. and Thomas Brierly Jr. The trio made extensive improvements. Next, the curved front of the building was added which was designed to provide a glass windowed private banquet hall on the second floor, although that part of the second floor appears to have never been used. The main floor was altered to include a distinctive bar from the famous, now demolished, Odenbach Peacock Room from Main and Clinton in downtown Rochester. In 1947, they changed the name to the NEW Dutch Mill. Saturday afternoon movies were added and in 1948 it was advertised as the nation's first Cinema Restaurant. Bands played for dancing in the evenings.

In 1984, Chester and Sharon Ventura bought the restaurant and remodeled it; the name went back to just the Dutch Mill. In 2016, AnnMarie and Bob Simmons took over the operation. The Simmons immediately became involved in the community by offering fundraising opportunities and participating in community events. They brought in new bands, started an open mic night, and with their big screen television, drew packed crowds during major sporting events.

Over the years the Dutch Mill was our town's gathering or meeting place. Nearly every organization held their meetings and banquets there. Clam bakes, dance lessons, and euchre clubs regularly met there and countless wedding receptions took place on the second floor. All the while, the old windmill, although now a bit tattered, stood atop the building.

This past spring, we were saddened to learn that the Dutch Mill was sold to the plaza owners next door. On Saturday, April 16, 2022, the Simmons served their last customers, then closed and locked the doors. Currently there has been no announcement about the future of the old place. It is not a designated landmark, so the new owners can do whatever zoning laws allow. We can only surmise its future.



Leon Cox



The Dutch Mill - April 17, 2022