

# The Lowman Family And Its Whiskey

*The story of Old Lowman Whiskey is told by Howard A. Hanlon in the May-June 1973 issue of Hardwood Bark, the lively periodical of Cotton-Hanlon Inc. of Odessa and Cayuta. Mr. Hanlon is president of the company. He has authored many articles on the history of our region. Following is a digest of "The Lowman Family and Its Whiskey."*

This article originated from memories of my childhood. My father was a lumberman, but we usually lived on a farm and kept quite a few hogs. The mash from the Old Lowman Distillery made excellent hog feed or "swill."

Our farm home near Wellsburg was a combination lumber camp and farm. Usually there would be several men about; Dad usually had other camps of a half-dozen or more men. Old Lowman Rye Whiskey was the byword for the lumberjacks. It usually sold for \$1.00-\$1.25 a quart, whereas ordinary whiskey could be bought for \$.65-.75 a quart. Klapproth's Saloon on Lake St. was said to have the exclusive sale of Old Lowman Whiskey . . . Old Lowman was made 90-100 proof.

## The Background of Old Lowman Whiskey

The Lowmans were among the older settlers in Chemung County. They descended from a German family who came from the old country to Middletown, Pa. Those who came to Chemung County apparently were all descendants of George Lowman (Lauman was the original name) who died in Middletown, Pa., and was buried there in 1809 at the age of 65. He had nine children.

In the spring of 1788, Jacob Lowman, a young man of 19 years, then living in his native

Middletown and who was a son of George Lauman previously mentioned, watched the building of many Durham boats on the banks of the river near his home. These boats had been used to transfer supplies and ammunition for General Sullivan's Army up the Susquehanna River. He was intrigued by the many stories he heard of the beauty of the Chemung Valley as told by Sullivan's soldiers. He was energetic and ambitious, and had the advice of a wise and prudent father who helped him procure a Durham boat adapted to river navigation. The boat had a capacity of 20 tons. He loaded it with merchandise of the kind which it was thought he might be able to barter with the new white settlers in and about Tioga Point. This cargo was mostly of tobacco, liquor, guns, chains, axes, tools, and the like. The boat did not require a great depth of water so it was possible for several strong men with long poles to push the boat against the current.

Several settlers had established homes around Tioga Point. A few families had settled farther up the Chemung River. In 1788, the Buck, Bennett, McDowell, Burt, Warren, Wyncoop, and other families had settled about what is now the village of Chemung. Young Jacob had no trouble of

Chemung from where they built a dock for their boats. The land was heavily timbered which they cut and floated down the river. They set up a whiskey distillery at this point where they made Old Lowman Whiskey from a mixed mash of rye and corn. This no doubt was the first commercial distillery in the locality. The formula was the same formula from which the Lowman's Old Lowman Whiskey was made at a later date.

The year 1792 proved to be a very important one in the life of Jacob Lowman then 23 years of age. He acquired his first tract of real estate across from the present Wilawana. David Bosworth, a hardy pioneer from Connecticut, owner and occupant of a tract of land on the opposite side of the river in Pennsylvania just below the present hamlet of Wilawana, had a daughter. Being a man of action, Jacob knew what he wanted and before the summer was over he persuaded Miss Hulda Bosworth, age 18, to marry him and move across the river to his new log house. The log cabin was a one-room affair with one fireplace for warmth, comfort, and cooking. Hulda and her husband slept in a bunk in one corner. The loft upstairs was reached through a hole in the ceiling. Two of the Lowman children were born in this log cabin. One of the children was later to become the wife of John G. McDowell, a very important family in the Chemung Valley. A well-known descendant is Boyd McDowell, Senior vice president of Chemung Canal Trust Co.

John McDowell was State Senator for several years from the Sixth District which included the counties of Delaware, Broome, Otsego, Chenango, Tioga, Cortland, Tompkins, and Chemung, then a

## Rye Plus Corn

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This photo of "the last bottle" of Old Lowman Whiskey was taken in February, 1973. This was preserved all these years by Louis Lowman, son of E. M. Lowman, who operated the distillery at Lowman which closed in 1918-1919.

disposing of his goods at Tioga Point, but he had to take in exchange grain, flax, pelts, and hemp from the settlers who had no money. This business proved very profitable. Jacob Lowman bought more boats and extended his business far up the Chemung. His ability was most helpful to the farmers as he supplied tools and supplies and took their produce in exchange.

## Rye Plus Corn

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part of Tioga County. Although he never studied law nor was admitted to the bar, he was known far and wide as Judge McDowell. He was instrumental in securing the charter for the Chemung Canal Bank. This was the bank that the Amots took control of in later years.

Buck's Hotel at Chemung was a popular gathering place for many years until the Civil War and while after that. The landlord was George Washington Buck, a member of the first white family who came to the county 1776-78. Buck was a practical politician and one of the golden-haired boys of Judge McDowell's Democratic political machine. He was supervisor of the Town of Chemung and served several terms as member of Assembly from Chemung County. It was not unusual to hear the strong boisterous voice of Judge McDowell raised in support of some political principal or candidate at Buck's Hotel.

Those were the days before ginger ale. The prevailing drink at Buck's Hotel was Old Lowman Whiskey and this was in 1843.

J. B. Clark who came from Bainbridge, N. Y. was a very successful businessman and for years was a congressman from the Southern Tier. Julia McDowell and J. B. Clark were married in Chemung October 7, 1843. It was a great event. Gen. Charles J. Langdon married Josephine, a daughter of J. B. Clark.

In 1799, Jacob Lowman Sr. bought a tract of land at the mouth of Baldwin Creek near where the hamlet of Lowman is now located. He built the same crude type of cabin as previously mentioned. Tallow candles and fat pine were used for lighting purposes. Wolves, wildcats, and

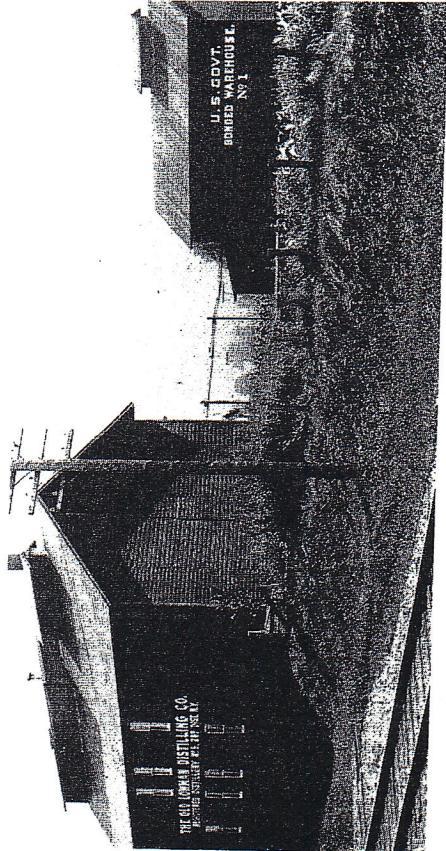
other dangerous animals abounded in the woods at the time.

In 1802, Jacob Lowman, Sr. bought from John Spaulding great lot No. 19. On this lot, he built a fine frame house and moved out of the log cabin to his new residence. When he died, this house went to Jacob Lowman, Jr. who occupied it until his death. Some other alterations have been made, but in the main part, it is still the same as Jacob Sr. left it when he died in 1840. The old residence later became the home of Hovey Copley, and at the present time is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jason Knapp.

In 1819, when Jacob Lowman built the frame house on his farm and took up residence there, his son George began keeping house in his father's log house with his wife Lillas. All of their large family was born there except the youngest. In 1838, George built a frame building across from his new house which he set up as an inn, which they opened in the fall of that year. There was a bar where whiskey was sold (We assume Old Lowman) and travelers were put up. The stagecoach and inns were almost as numerous in those days as tourist homes are at the present time.

#### The Kansas Adventure

Hovey Everett Lowman, son of George Lowman born 1829, who had had considerable education entered the newspaper field as a novice. He was connected with the Elmira Republican for several years. The paper was the organ of the Whig Political party and was under very able management. The party's slogan of "America for Americans" and anti-popery propaganda appealed to the voters at the time, but as all political movements with one idea, that soon died out. With



The Lowman distillery and warehouse pictured after it closed in the World War I era. It was across the D.L. tracks from Rt. 17, on the right of the road from Lowman to Wellsburg. (Photo loaned by Mrs. Helen Bosworth Beers.)

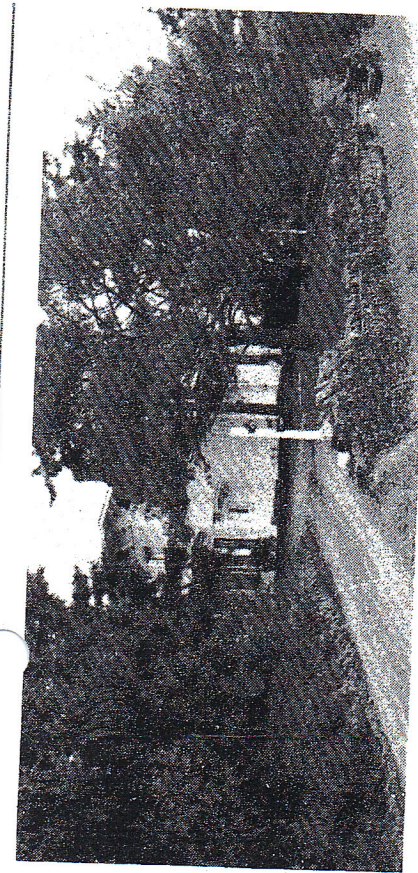
partner, J. C. Trask, was shot to death.

George Lowman inherited from his father a large number of lumber operations and several gristmills on Baldwin Creek. In connection with this, George Lowman operated successfully a distillery on Baldwin Creek in Lowman, where they made the widely known Old Lowman Rye Whiskey from the same formula held since the pioneer days. This business was discontinued when the War Between the States started largely because of the prohibitive tax levied by the federal government.

Jacob Lowman Jr. was the son of Jacob and Hilda Lowman and was born December 1817 and died in Lowman April 9, 1891. Jacob Lowman Jr. was a bachelor. He was one of the first men in the region to grow tobacco. At one time, he established a tobacco warehouse in Elmira with John Brand. He was a very wealthy man and owned thousands of acres of land about Lowman. It looks like at one time he owned about all of it. He was a very

the collapse of the Know-Nothing Party, the Elmira Republican blew up.

Hovey Everett Lowman and his brothers John G. Lowman and Lyman went to seek fame and fortune in Kansas where men were in a deep struggle. There were two distinct groups—Slavery and Anti-slavery. This conflict went on for years. H. E. Lowman, young, brilliant, and forceful, and others established a newspaper in Lawrence called the Kansas State Journal. The paper prospered and fought to keep slavery out of Kansas. The Civil War came on while the slavery question was still paramount in Kansas. Kansas operations were mostly confined to a guerrilla form of warfare. William C. Quantrell, leader of a Missouri force of men, raided Lawrence, Kansas, and in a few hours shot and killed 160 of the civilians, burned almost all the buildings and pillaged. The office of the Kansas State Journal was particularly an object of attack. Its presses and all equipment were destroyed. Hovey E. Lowman survived, but his business



This is the original home of Jacob Lowman, Sr., built in 1819. Today, Mr. and Mrs. Jason Knapp (Mary Copley), reside there. Mary Knapp is a descendant of Jacob Lowman.

kind-hearted man and fond of children.

**Newtown Monument**

One summer evening in 1875 in Lockwood's store in Wellsburg, R. C. Lockwood, Jacob Lowman, Jr. and William M. Gregg of Elmira discussed having a centennial celebration on the field where the Battle of Newtown took place. They later talked to their friends Stephen T. Arnot and Judge Thurston and got a hearty response.

This began the movement which culminated in a glorious and impressive event on Aug. 29, 1879, to commemorate the Battle of Newtown.

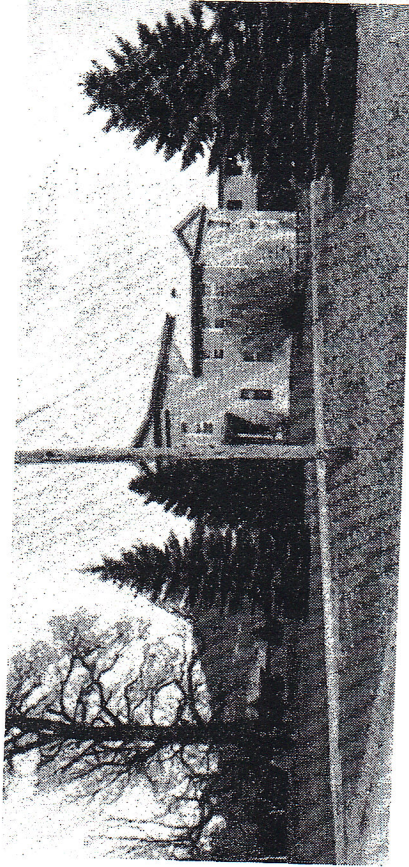
The site finally chosen was on top of the hill at the foot of which the battle took place. Jacob Lowman agreed to donate the stone from his farm at Greatsinger Corners. All members of the community were present. Miles Baldwin, a pioneer who lived nearby, bought picnic lunch with plenty of rinkables (likely Old Lowman Whiskey) and made a day of it. It was agreed after looking over the ground that it was the most desirable. At the close of the day,

settlement of the question finally came. Alfred Searles gave the land needed. A road was built as a dug road up the side of the hill from Baldwin Creek, and Contractor McGreevey did the work. After the monument was erected, more than 50,000 persons arrived at the celebration on the 29th day of August 1879.

The monument began to deteriorate within 25 years, and the final blow was struck by some boys who touched off an explosive on one corner. As early as 1905 its bad condition concerned the Sons of the American Revolution. After much haggling with its Legislature, on Sept. 19, 1907, they made a proposal recommending a rock-faced marker to be placed at the intersection of old Route 17 and the road leading to Wellsburg on land owned by Edward Lowman.

In 1911, John Murtaugh was elected State Senator and constant requests were made to Senator Murtaugh for funds to replace the old monument. In 1912, the Legislature appropriated the funds for the monument and the park we all are familiar with.

The George Lowman home built in 1839 is occupied by the Misses Alice Marian and Leslie Grace, descendants of Jacob Lowman, Sr. and George Lowman. The home is one-half mile east of Lowman.



Jacob Lowman Jr. suffered greatly during the closing years of his life from arthritis. All means were taken, known to medicine, to relieve his suffering. In 1891, he died in the great front bedroom of the Jacob Lowman House at Lowman (still there). The funeral was held from his residence. There was a large attendance. Special trains from Elmira and Waverly were run to accommodate the large number of persons who wanted to pay tribute to his memory.

**The 1902 Distillery**

Abner Wright had a creamery at the end of the Wellsburg Bridge. The Lowmans had a creamery at Lowman just about where the Lowman Distillery was finally built which was very close to the DL & W Railroad tracks. The creamery business on the Lowman side of the river was no longer profitable, so Ed Lowman decided to give up the creamery business and build a distillery in the old creamery using the same Old Lowman Formula that had been used during several periods mentioned in this article.

In 1902, Ed Lowman, Fred Fer-

ris, Fred L. Thomas, and Nathan Blostein incorporated the Old Lowman Distilling Company to manufacture, supply and deal in whiskey and other alcoholic liquors. The incorporated location of business was the City of Elmira, so we assume that was their headquarters, even though, the distillery was at Lowman. The original capital stock was \$9,000. There were 90 shares at \$100 each. The directors were the incorporators as mentioned. May 15, 1911, the consent of the stockholders increased the capital stock to \$30,000 with 300 shares of par value of \$100 each. In this action, the corporate papers were signed by Edward Lowman, Eleanor Lowman Copley, and Mal-den C. Lowman. Nathan Blostein of Lowman, grandfather of Dr. Morris Blostein of Horseheads, apparently was the distiller.

Dan Grace was the station agent at Lowman during most of the duration of the distillery. It appears that he might have retired about 1920, and then Jimmy Waterman perhaps took over because the writer remembers Jimmy Waterman saying that Elmo



Residence of William Lowman, built about 1839 at Lowman, until recently was the home of Mrs. Bertha Lowman Hoffman and Mrs. Florence Lowman Myers, two of William Lowman's direct descendants.

Duhl, the excise man, told him that "this was evidently the last time around, they were cleaning out the whiskey, and if you had a bottle you'd better get it filled now, this would be the last chance."

Prohibition came in 1918. That was the end of the distillery days. Prior to that Ed Lowman tried desperately to get rid of his whiskey. He afterwards said that if he had sealed off the warehouse and the whiskey set there for a few years under bond he might have gotten as much as \$200,000 for the whiskey that he had in the warehouse.

The story comes from Louis, Ed's son, that they only made three casks of whiskey a week. That sounds a little low, but that's what Louis insisted the capacity was. Likely, it was not necessary for anyone to be around the distillery very much of the time.

The lumber from the bonded warehouse, when it was torn down, was used to build a community hall on the Lowman M. E. church. This was given to the

church by Edward M. Lowman.

Baldwin Kelsey ran the hotel on the corner in Wellsburg. I don't remember the original name, but they always called it Kelseys. The reason I mentioned it is that he was at one time the principal distributor of Old Lowman Whiskey in Wellsburg. At that time, there were four hotels in Wellsburg. The big fire in 1912 burned two of them.

Martin Lowman lived on Front St. and carried the mail. This house is now made over into a Baptist church. He had a son, Elwyn Lowman, whom I chummed around with, it was quite a long mail route. A closed-in-mail wagon carried him on his route that went from Wellsburg to Big Pond and back to Centerville then over Durkee (Durgy) Hill and down into Wellsburg again. That was a long day's drive for one horse, and about twice as far as the rural mail carriers go today in an automobile. This Martin Lowman was a descendant of the original George Lauman family of Middletown, Pa.



Photo of the E. M. Lowman house occupied by E. M. Lowman, who was proprietor of the distillery. Granite Newtown Battle marker is in front of this house. Lowman family has not occupied this residence for several years.

Some of the material for this article was taken from the book, "The Lowman Family of Chemung County" published by Seymour Lowman in 1938. Other material was checked from the "Foxfire Book" published in 1972 by Doubleday and Co. edited by Elliot Williamston. The principal part of this article was taken from personal experiences and from information given me by people still living, who in their youth were familiar with many of the items mentioned. Many descendants of the Lowman family courteously furnished me data. Incorporation Records were obtained from the Chemung County Clerk's office.

#### CORRECTION

Edward Eugene Loomis, husband of Julia Olivia Langdon, was president of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and not the D.L. & W. as erroneously stated in the June, 1973, Historical Journal, p. 2280.

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