

# **MASSEY-WOOD**

**A TALE OF TWO COMPANIES**

**By**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **Materials:**

**Excerpts from 1949 Massey Harris History Book produced by the Massey Harris Company to celebrate its centennial (1847-1947)**

**Charles Filkins, Museum Director and Phillip Leonard, Treasurer both associated with the Hoosick Falls Township Historical Society, Hoosick Falls, NY, the location of the Walter A. Wood factory when it was in operation from 1965 until 1924.**

**Clara Griswold who spent many hours proofreading and typing all this material on the computer.**

## Part 1

## Introduction

To have a successful manufacturing operation over an extended period of time, the product must be of high quality from the very beginning and it must have guaranteed replacement parts over a broad network of outlets with a name that demands respect. How has the Massey name garnered this reputation?

Reaching back to the birth of the famous worldwide company we recognize that that seed was sown in the person of Daniel Massey when he established the Newcastle Agricultural Works in the village of Newcastle, Canada. It appears that he and later his son, Hart, were the right kind of individuals to build a business that would have all the attributes of a successful enterprise projecting into the future.

In reading of their activities of the mid-1800's (as recorded in the 1947 publication of Massey Harris Company for its centennial), we cannot fail to see a bright future for their endeavors. They were resourceful, energetic, intelligent, creative and determined in looking to select the best product from a pool of possible solutions to problems that faced them. It seems that they came out winners of manufacturing farm equipment for not only their immediate neighbors, but for the industrial agricultural climate developing in Canada in the mid-1800's and on into the future.

Hart Massey visited various locations where he found the best equipment invented not only in Canada, but also in the United States. He traveled across Lake Ontario to visit family members in New York State. It may be this is where he was introduced to the harvesting machinery produced by Walter A. Wood in Hoosick Falls, New York.

Just after the Civil War a very important event took place that started the birth of the international fame for Massey and evolved into today's worldwide-recognized quality products produced by Massey Ferguson.

It is best related by quoting a passage from the 1947 Massey-Harris History Book produced by the Massey-Harris Company to celebrate its centennial...

“During this period Hart Massey turned his attention to harvesting machinery to the eventual exclusion of all other lines. While constantly seeking to improve the performance of his Canadian-made Ketchum and Manny machines, the Proprietor of the Newcastle agricultural Works followed progress in other countries and made frequent journeys to attend the American field trials which were assuming more and more importance in the world of agriculture. As a result, the Massey firm was able to announce, in its third annual catalog published in 1860-61, the Canadian manufacture of the “Wood's Mower”, a grass cutting machine which had already won distinction for itself in the United States and the British Isles.

Forgotten today, perhaps, eighty-five years ago the “Wood's Mower” was hailed as a tremendous step forward in laborsaving machinery. Earlier grass cutting machines were mounted on a single wheel, had a rigid mounted cutter bar and were heavy and inflexible in operation. The Wood invention was mounted on two wheels and had a flexible mounted steel cutter bar, which could be adjusted to irregularities in the ground. To permit easier travel to and from the fields, the

cutter bar was first made detachable and later hinged. Although no more than ten acres a day were claimed for the “Wood’s Mower”, it was lighter and more durable than any yet produced and had the great advantage of operating under rough conditions, an important feature on Canadian farms.

The Massey catalog for 1862 -63 carried an equally important announcement to the farmers of the day: the manufacture of Wood’s Self Rake Reaper, a machine that marked the next important advance in the development of harvesting machinery. While generally similar in appearance to the earlier Hand Rake Reapers, the Wood’s Self Rake had many advantages. The driver rode the machine and could control its operations: the cutter bar could be raised and lowered at will with any kind of grain at intervals from the platform and deposited it on the stubble for binding.

With the addition of the self-raking device all operations except binding into sheaves were accomplished mechanically; the labor of one man, the raker, became unnecessary and a boy with a team of horses could cut and leave in gavels twelve to fifteen acres of grain in one day.

In 1864, soon after production of Wood’s Self Rake Reaper was started, the Newcastle Agricultural works were completely destroyed by fire at the busiest time of the year, entailing the loss of a year’s business. Rebuilt on larger lines, the plant was again turning out mowers; self rake reapers and other machinery in time for the 1865 harvest. Exhibited that year and the year following at Provincial Exhibitions, H.A. Massey’s Canadian-Made Wood’s Self Rake Reapers swept the field in competition with all the leading makers of machines, domestic and imported.

At the Toronto Industrial Exhibition of 1866, Massey harvesting machinery was chosen to represent Canadian manufacturing at the International Exposition to be held in Paris, France, the following year. Exhibited there in 1867, the year that saw the formation of the Dominion of Canada, the same machinery was awarded the First Grand Prize, the highest award given for laborsaving machinery. Two Grand Medals were also presented H. A. Massey for the excellence of his exhibit and performance of his machines in the field. At the conclusion of the trials, Emperor Napoleon 111 purchased a “Wood’s Mower” made in this little Canadian village of Newcastle and ordered that none but Wood’s patented machinery be used on the Imperial farms. As a mark of extraordinary esteem, the inventor, Walter A. Wood, received the Cross of Chevalier of Legion of Honor.

As an interesting footnote to the Paris triumph, an order was received some time later at Newcastle, no longer in Canada West but in Ontario, for a number of Massey Wood’s machines to be shipped to Germany. Great excitement attended the loading of the railway cars at Newcastle but none of those present, including the Proprietor of the Agricultural Works himself, could have realized that they were witnessing the birth of Canada’s worldwide export trade in manufactured products.”

Not only was this the birth of Canada's export trade, but it was Massey's as well. Though the name on the machinery was Walter A. Wood, it was of the highest quality and Massey business outlets were making it available to the farmers in Canada. Later other parts of the world were introduced to quality merchandise and the name Massey was attached to it as being the outlet franchise business.

Less than a decade later another significant event happened. Again from the Massey Harris History Book the event is recorded.

“Extensions of the Newcastle Works from 1870 to 1876 doubled the capacity and to the tried and proven Wood's Harvester Machinery and the immensely successful Sharp's Horse Rake were added two American innovations: the Hubbard and Johnson Self Rake Reapers. In each reel, which had been characteristic of the Wood's and other reapers, was replaced by eccentrically mounting rakes. In succession these forced the standing stalks against the cutting bar and followed through to swap the grain off the platform and into the stubble. While the daily cut was not appreciably bettered, the new type machine embodied lightness of draught, simplicity and reliability and remained with farmers for many years. In 1876, the Massey Company took out the first Canadian patents on a self-binder and in 1878 introduced the Massey Mower and Massey Harvester, the first products to be manufactured under the company's exclusive patent and sold under its brand name.”

We can be sure that these products were patterned after the Wood's mower and reaper machines with modifications. We see how the Massey Company developed its great reputation by selling products developed by outside inventors. Now after 1876, it could use the Massey name. Obviously patents had expired and Massey could manufacture its own machinery with improvements that were developed by its own engineers.

Hart Massey's mind was maturing. The first shipment of Massey-Wood's machinery to Germany helped him realize that his products could go anywhere in the world and meet any agricultural need. It took time, but not only did he gain experience in perfecting efficient ways to carry out the export business, but he learned how to adapt or modify machinery to fit the various conditions in different parts of the world. Thus places like France, England, Russia, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and other world places became outlets for his fine harvesting machinery.

The Harris Company of Canada under the leadership of Alanson Harris followed a very similar development that the Massey Company generated. Because they both were manufacturing similar quality harvesting implements along with the idea of one outlet per area avoiding competitive operation and saving personal and maintenance costs were strong enough reasons to combine operations. They completed negotiations in 1891 and named the new company Massey Harris. Hart Massey became the president and carried on business in the same successful manner he used in years preceding the merger.

It is noted in reading the history of Massey Harris that the company leaders over its extended existence looked to outside quality sources for products to fulfill their various needs that are presented season after season or year after year. This is what happened when the “Wood's

Mower” became licensed by Massey. All improvements were available to the Massey Company through the licensed privileges.

## **Part II Who is Walter A. Wood?**

It is necessary to deliver a historical background of Mr. Wood to establish credentials regarding the importance of why the Walter A. Wood factor is of great importance to the development of Massey’s worldwide fame in the agricultural farm machinery industry to this day. It all hinges on what happened during the 1860’s and 1870’s.

Walter A. Wood was born October 23, 1815 in New Hampshire. His father, Aaron Wood, manufactured wagons and plows. The plow was significant because it was one of the first with an all iron blade and patented by Jethro Wood (no relation) in 1819. When Walter was one, Aaron Wood moved his family to upstate New York where he continued making farm equipment and taught his son, Walter, both the mechanical and business aspects of the industry.

Walter Wood moved to Hoosick Falls, New York, in 1836 and worked in a local machine shop on the site of his future manufacturing enterprise.

As an interesting sidelight, Wood left Hoosick Falls in 1840 and set up his own carriage shop in Nashville, Tennessee. It was here where he proudly made the iron works for the carriage of the future president of the United States, James K. Polk. Royston S. Wheeler from Hampshire, England (an employee at the English Wood Company until 1984) supplied this additional information. In 1853 Cyrus McCormick brought a lawsuit against Walter A. Wood alleging infringement of his patents. Wood hired a lawyer to defend the case, which resulted in his favor. The lawyer was Abraham Lincoln.

By 1848, Wood had returned to Hoosick Falls and was trying to invent his own mowing machine without success. However, John H. Manny had a patent on a mower in 1851 and in field trials did have some success. In 1852, Wood bought the rights from Manny to manufacture the machine in his own shop, probably with modifications. Thus began the concept of building his own farm harvesting machine company.

It is interesting to note that Hart Massey also manufactured the Manny machine to market in Canada. Maybe this is where Walter A. Wood and Hart Massey became acquainted and later formed a business relationship.

With modifications the original Manny mowing machine became very well received by the farming establishment and Wood had to expand his business with more property, buildings and employment. By 1857, Wood introduced his machines in England and Europe that garnered the highest awards in nearly all the events. The circumstances surrounding the highly important First Grand Prize of the 1867 International Exposition in Paris, France were apparently the vital connecting factors in the Massey and Wood Companies that are recorded earlier in this narrative.

By 1859, Walter A. Wood produced 18,600 machines and had his patent on the Walter A. Wood Manny machine. In the decade between 1860 and 1870 Walter A. Wood entered many worldwide competitions with his machinery. Hundreds of his entries received the top awards. As a

result, he expanded his business so that by 1866 his company incorporated under the name Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Company, with Walter A. Wood as president. He was employing 450 men, grossing an annual income of one million dollars and manufacturing 10,000 machines per year.

A very important incident occurred in 1860. Wood sold the right to manufacture the one-man machine (Wood's Mower) to Hart Massey in Canada. Again the two men must have known each other. Also, in that year the entire Walter A. Wood plant on the north side of the Hoosick River burned. The Massey contract maintained enough income to help keep the business in a solvent state until the buildings could be replaced.

As a future reference will be made to this, another fire destroyed all the same buildings north of the river in 1870. A new foundry, 80 feet by 200 feet was completed by 1873. The foundry was located parallel to the Hoosick River with Mechanic Street running directly between them. This street is important because it is the only passage into Hoosick Falls from the West Hoosick farming area. At the east end of the 200 foot foundry building, people turned left to gain admittance to the factory complex or right to enter the Shop Bridge that crossed the Hoosick River just below the water falls which supplied power for the plant operations. At the south end of the bridge the road continued up a rather steep grade that gave entrance to the hamlet of Hoosick Falls, where most of Mr. Wood's factory workers resided. The population of Hoosick Falls in 1850 was 1000 people and increased to over 6,000 people in the highly successful production years of the 1880's and 1890's.

From information gleaned by Joseph Holloway, the town of Hoosick historian in 1987, we find that Walter A. Wood was successful in many aspects of life- politics, religion, banking, world travel, education and other quality of life activities. His support of individuals who invented machinery by supplying financial aid and subsequent production of the machinery is well documented. The John H. Manny relationship has to rank very high on that list as an important reason Wood met with initial manufacturing success. In 1869 Wood was introduced to Sylvanus Locke who developed a grain binder that tied the grain bundles with wire and later with twine. This was the first such machine in the United States with a patent. Wood had Locke adapt the knotting mechanism to this Wood rake binder and it worked. By 1874 it was patented.

Mr. Wood was elected to the United States House of Representatives for two terms and refused to run for a third term. He owned over 1000 acres of land with 600 acres in cultivation to operate a highly productive farm. This enterprise also supported many acres of well-tended park and garden acres surrounding the magnificent mansion for his residence. The English type (castle-like) mansion was completed in 1873 at a cost of over \$350,000. This was located on the backside of the beautiful fenced park that bordered Main Street.

Mr. Wood attained hundreds of patents in his lifetime. As previously noted, his implements were entered in many field competitions that were popular in those days. These resulted in many grand prizes that aided in favorably increasing his fame, creditability, wealth and humanity. When he died in 1892, his entire workforce lined both sides of Main Street as the funeral carriage passed by on the way to the cemetery. Hundreds formed a solemn walking procession after the

passing of the funeral cortege all the way to the burial site. He was highly eulogized at his death by many from all over the world. He was held in high esteem.

Shortly before he died, Mr. Wood turned down an offer to merge with McCormick and Deering. In 1910, these two companies merged with International Harvester and took over the great western grain areas of the U. S. forcing the Wood Company to rely on foreign markets of England, Europe, Russia and elsewhere.

The Great War of 1914 to 1918 destroyed the company's market and froze accounts until after the Armistice. Inflation brought financial disaster depriving the company's ability to carry on business. Tragically, it was forced into receivership and all operations ceased by 1924.

Just after the turn of the century all functioning entities and property in England were sold locally to avoid high tariffs. The new owner was able to successfully continue operations despite the parent company's failure in America. In World War 11, the Walter A. Wood Ltd. of England was mandated to continue manufacturing farm equipment instead of war munitions as many manufacturing companies had their normal peace time production change over to land, sea and air warfare supplies. This government decree that was issued by Sir Winston Churchill also proclaimed that the landowners of thousands of acres of parkland and pasture be tilled to aid in the feeding of the wartime population, thus the need for Wood's continued manufacture of farm equipment. Food supplies from overseas were made unavailable now that this island nation was essentially isolated from vital imports due to enemy submarine warfare.

Though the Wood ownership in England changed hands at a later date, the company successfully continued on into the 1980's. Finally, the last remnants of this great company, the Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Company, ended after 1984, when ironically, the new owner became the Massey Ferguson Company-the successor to Hart Massey's company which purchased a license to build the Wood's mowers and reapers around 1860.

The story line of how the Walter A. Wood machinery became important to the positive development of the Massey Harris Company has parallels. The mindset was established.

Because farming was swiftly moving from horse drawn equipment to tractor drawn equipment in the 1920's, the Massey Harris Company needed a tractor to fill that need as competitors were already making theirs available. Massey Harris offered the Wallis Tractor after trying other makes without success. The Wallis was obviously a great tractor. The 1927 Wallis certified 20-30 became the Massey Harris 25. Again in 1928, the Wallis 12-20 became the Massey Harris Challenger and Pacemaker. It is possible that under the right circumstances the Massey Harris name could have been changed to Massey Wallis.

Again, as with the Walter A. Wood story, Massey Harris engineers gained knowledge and designed and built their own tractors. The General Purpose Tractor was the first four-wheel drive tractor in the world designed for farm use. Development of tractors continued under the Massey Harris name through the triple numbered series when a new name entered the picture.

Harry Ferguson created a revolution in farming the soil. His mind imagined how a tractor could pull more with less fuel, less labor and great convenience for the operator than any former power source. He went through stages of disappointment until his hydraulically controlled three-point hitch was perfected. The epic story of Massey Harris combining with Harry Ferguson in the 1950's is well known leading to the company name changing to Massey Harris Ferguson and a short time later, to Massey Ferguson.

Now Massey owned the Ferguson System and the rest of the farm industry followed suit with their versions. However, today Ferguson's same basic design is incorporated everywhere. The Ferguson story is another way of Massey building a high quality farm implement company such as that when Hart Massey found the "Wood's Mower" back in the 1860's.

Recently the Hesston Company of high quality hay making machinery was added to the Massey name. I see the Massey Ferguson name on new hay balers in the Rio Grande Valley that I never saw before. The name of Massey is moving out again along the same storyline.

It is interesting to follow through on the events that may be considered as to why the Massey name is recognized today as a great institution of global scope.

It is all together possible that without the first step of Hart Massey discovering the "Wood's Mower" and securing the license to manufacture and sell it in Canada, there would not have been a Massey Ferguson Company today. There would not have been machines shipped to Germany from Newcastle after the Paris Triumph of 1867. This may all be predicated on the fact that Hart Massey found the "Wood's Mower".

The foresight of Hart Massey to secure the license to manufacture this "Wood's Mower" and incorporate it in the listing of all his 1860-61 catalog of agricultural machinery cannot be ignored. It established quality material in Canada and later into the world in 1867 when it was recognized and given the highest award at the Paris International Exposition. Later on, the export activity began with the order from Germany. Walter A. Wood's contribution to the success of the Massey name cannot be sidestepped.

The author of an epic historical fiction novel could not write a better background scenario regarding the twists and turns that the actual historical tale the Massey name records.

### **Part III      Why is this of importance to me and I feel others should know?**

Most of us feel a need to be satisfied with knowledge about our family tree. It completes unanswered questions and gives a new sense of belonging. It answers the questions of who, when, where, what and why. Anyone who utilizes products that provide genuine satisfaction enjoys knowing about its background.

Allow me to develop a brief of personal material that binds me to the Massey and Walter A. Wood companies.

The first bit of personal material revolves around my childhood family. All six children in our family grew up on our patents' 300 acre dairy farm less than eight miles west of Hoosick Falls, New York. Prior to 1940 our father mainly used a team of horses for the heavy farm work. He utilized us three boys to get the everyday farm chores done. I was the youngest.

When I was less than ten years old, my father would have me stand on the front hayrack to drive the team of horses down the windrows of hay while he and my older brother, Earl, gathered the hay on the wagon from the hay loader pulled behind the wagon. It was not the easiest thing for me to do, as I had to keep the horses true to the rows by turning the corners properly so that by going wider than the raked rows the hay loader remained on row. At the same time, I had to follow Dad's instructions to slow down or stop. I remember that sometimes there was many words spoken that turned the air "blue" when a slat broke on the hay loader or another malfunction occurred.

In 1940 Dad was able to purchase a 1939 Massey Harris, 101 Junior tractor with a two-bottom 14 inch plow for less than one thousand dollars.

What a day it was for me because Dad shortened the pole on the hay wagon and taught me how to drive the 101 Massey. Not only did I get to drive the tractor on the hay wagon, but he shortened most every pole on implements made for a team of horses and the 101 Massey and I became his hybrid mechanical-human team of horses. He sold his team of horses just after the war because there was no need for them anymore. He was born in 1896 on a farm and naturally horses were a vital part of his life. I'm sure it was a sad day for him.

Nevertheless, what a time I had with the 1928 Bonnie Johnson reaper/ binder with Dad on the back. He let me experiment on the turns until we went around any turn by steering and breaking the tractor properly without leaving any grain uncut. Understanding geometry in my subconscious mind became evident again. Eventually we rarely stopped going around and around the remaining uncut oats or wheat. This was often because I do not believe the cutter bar was over four feet wide if even that.

I am still hearing my father yell, "Whoa!" when problems arose. I can also imagine the tractor talk to me when the governor opened up the throttle while breaking on the corners. I can also still hear wild noises from the machine and simultaneously see the reel, canvases and bundles of grain being tied and kicked out of the machine one at a time. What a "trip". Every twelve year old should have this experience. I can see Dad smiling now. He could not resist bragging on me to others.

As an added note, the Bonnie Johnson reaper/binder was designed to be pulled by three horses; however, Dad only had two. On particularly hot and humid days he could harvest the grain for no more than 30 minutes and the horses would be drenched in sweat. If possible, he had to find shade to allow his horses some rest time. It took hours to finish a five acres field. I am positive that both Dad and the horses were exhausted at the completion of the task.

We can understand how relieved and pleased Dad was after switching over to his hybrid mechanical –human team performing non-stop corners and not having to stop to rest the horses. He had a strong constant power source pulling the binder to harvest the grain in a fraction of the completion time as compared to the horse drawn days. Now he maintained a smile that lasted beyond the completion of the yearly harvest.

This went on all during the war. My attachment to Massey Harris is highly imprinted on my mind with over a decade (10 years old to 21 years old when I enlisted in the army) of constant

tractor operation on that 101 Junior. Our neighbors thought I could make the tractor do things (so it seemed to them) that no one else could. One neighbor once said, "When Rudy finishes plowing a field, it looks like a work of art."

To add more work for Dad's "hybrid", he purchased a Case three -man wire hay baler and a 7-foot Massey Harris Clipper bagger combine just after the war. We not only worked the farm more efficiently but also did custom work for the neighbors.

I just naturally knew what was going on inside each machine as it was performing its task. I also willed the machine to not dare malfunction. It appeared as though it were "Mind over Matter." However, I am sure it was the greasing of the machine twice daily that was the real reason for the constant high success achieved in the field operations.

To this day I am partial to Massey products. I have a 1952 Massey Harris "33" with a "444" engine, a Massey Harris Super 26 combine, parts for four "44 and "55" Massey Harris tractors, a Pony and an 1100 Massey Ferguson tractor that registers 3,200 hours with very good looking original tires all around.

After retiring from teaching high school math, I went into custom farming processing up to 125 acres of hay every 28 days with 6 to 7 cuttings of high yielding alfalfa during 7 to 8 months of a year. This was located in the upper Rio Grande irrigated land just north of El Paso, Texas. Everybody around me used John Deere or Case International equipment but I stayed with Massey as much as I could.

My interest in Walter A. Wood and Massey connection stems again from the fact that my parents' farm was eight miles west of Hoosick Falls, New York where the Walter A. Wood Company was located. All six of us children went to school in Hoosick Falls and every school day morning we rode the school bus that traveled down Mechanic Street by the 80 feet by 200 feet foundry building of the Wood factory built in 1873, crossed the Hoosick River just below the falls that generated power for the plant and on up to the high school that incorporated the castle like Walter A. Wood mansion. Of course we went home on the reverse route in the afternoon.

After the demise of the Walter A. Wood Company in 1924, the Wood family donated the mansion to the Hoosick Falls School District. After the addition of classrooms and a gymnasium on the north end of the mansion the high school was opened with the first graduating class in 1928. The school remained in session until 1961 when a centralized complex was completed outside of town that included grades one through seniors in high school.

The mansion portion of the school was impressive. The south entrance led into the central hallway where on the left was the drawing room, west entry and library. All three of these became the school library, which was a warm and pleasant place to be. The grand stairway led to the second floor of various classrooms that were probably bedrooms in former times.

In this magnificent building, powerful people from around the world visited. Unfortunately after the school was left vacant in 1961, the town leaders could not find a use for it nor could they afford to maintain it so it was demolished in 1968. With all the history it had garnered, it could have been a valuable asset to the community and Wood people, as well as Massey people of today.



reaper that I possess. My sister found it in New England and gave it to me. It would be fitting if more items could be found and displayed. Over a period of time, as word spread, we may see amazing things. These items may be shown as naturally as Wallis and Ferguson products are currently shown.

Owners of early Wood products should be proud of what their possession means to the worldwide development of farm machinery through the Massey name. Hoosick Falls, New York should be an important place in the minds of Massey people.

I majored in history in college and enjoy following the train of thought that trails though the writing of various historical facts on a subject. This research and written material has been mulling through my mind for years and is a personal joy and calling to bring it to fruition.

Also, my mother was from a place between Montreal and Quebec, Canada in the St. Lawrence River Valley. Her mother's maiden name was Masee. It just may be there is a bloodline involved. There are three purposes in compiling this article. First, this material is recorded with the intent that my descendants may find this information of interest as related to their heritage.

Next, it is evident that I wish to introduce Walter A. Wood to the Massey fold believing his contribution to Massey's success is of major importance and should be celebrated. But of equal intent, I want to let all who have an interest in restoring; promoting and using Massey products know why they may be able to be allowed to have this honored privilege.

What a legacy!

**12/1/13**