

# The First Dwelling in Baraboo Rapids

## *Tales of Earlier Days*

By Bob Dewel

Some 175 years ago, a frontiersman named Abe Wood first set foot in the area soon to be known as the Baraboo Rapids. This remarkable stretch of the Baraboo River, normally placid and gentle, drops over 40 feet in less than two miles, all within the Baraboo city limits. The alert explorer immediately recognized it as a prime location for a dam and a water-powered mill.

Wood had a problem however. A hostile tribe of Native Americans was encamped nearby and they had not learned of the recent treaty making the area west of the Wisconsin River available for settlers. His presence and the subsequent appearance of Eben and Roseline Peck were viewed as an invasion of their lands.

Wood, whose reputation was suspect, solved this problem by marrying a Native American woman. She probably was from the Portage area. When he returned the next year with her as his bride, he was allowed to stay, as were the Pecks. Abe Wood and Eben Peck were gone from the scene in a few years, but Roseline spent her life here, dying in 1899 as a respected pioneer in the community.

These early days have been reported in considerably more detail in previous articles. Recently while digging for other material in the Historical Society archives, we found a remarkable sketch of Wood's cabin, as shown with this article. Its construction date is not known, but was probably in the 1839-1842 period.

When the cabin was destroyed or moved is not known, but its location may still be faintly seen in indentations in the ground just west and north of the main shelter at Ochsner Park. A stone with a brass plaque was erected in 1924 by the Historical Society.

The cabin probably remained for many years after Wood's departure and subsequent death in Milton. What we also have is the probably accurate drawing of the structure as shown with this article, along with a narrative by an observer.

The unsigned narrative and sketch were apparently produced in 1905 at the request of a Historical Society member. With a few grammatical changes it reads as follows: "The first house in Baraboo was erected of logs on the bank above the river where the first dam was constructed. The house faced west, was 18 by 12 feet, the drip of the roof was to the east and west, board floor and boards for roof."

Continuing: "These were probably from the mill. Board door opening to the West, and just inside the door was a partition dividing the room into two parts. This partition ran from east to west. There was another door through the partition, the door being near the outside door. After going through the inside door the occupants turned to the right in order to enter the other room."

The person interviewed in this July 31, 1905 report was Daniel Reynolds. He came to Baraboo in 1843, and found his brother-in-law Lewis Brunson and family living in the cabin. As he remembered it then, "there were no windows, but if ever were, they were removed by the former occupants." The brief interview says that Wood had later built another dwelling on the "Island", now Island Court Street.

We know very little about Wood's associate in the dam construction, Wallace Rowan. He is said to have lived somewhat up river from Abe, in what is now West Baraboo. It is also said that Rowan was buried in an unmarked grave, date not known, somewhere in what is now West Baraboo.

Meanwhile Eben and Roseline had settled somewhere in what is now the east side of Baraboo, but in a few short years Peck departed, ostensibly for California. Recent research suggests he ended up in Texas and had a family there. Roseline remained here, overcoming many setbacks in subsequent years as reported extensively in earlier articles.

Probably all of the first houses were cabins, and the first school was also a log cabin. An observer at the time said that the space between the logs was so wide that one could throw a cat through it.



**The 1905 sketch of the Wood Cabin**

**Photo; Sauk County Historical Society**