Lysander Woodward Residence
1385 North Main Street
Rochester, Michigan
written by
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for the Rochester Avon Historical Society

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Introduction

The Lysander Woodward residence located at 1385 North Main St., Rochester, Oakland County, Michigan was originally built as the family home of one of Rochester’s pioneer era farmers and most prominent citizens. The house is believed to have been built between 1845 and 1850 and remained in the control of the Woodward family until 1933. It numbers among the oldest structures in the City of Rochester and may be, arguably, the oldest building within the current city limits, predating even the 1849 Rollin Sprague Store/Home Bakery building (National Register Information System #99000474).
The house is a Greek Revival gable front and wing arrangement. The earliest available image of the building is an engraving of it which appeared in the 1877 Durant history of Oakland County. This image, and a photograph taken of a portion of the front of the house in approximately 1895 reveal that the columned porch that currently extends along the entire front of the building is a revision and that the original porch was a much more modest feature that extended along the wing section only.

After the death of Eva Woodward Parker in 1933, the house passed out of the hands of the Woodward family. It remained a single-family dwelling until 1962, when the house was partitioned to convert it into an apartment house, which is its current use as of this writing in 2011.

One local history compilation gives the approximate construction date of the Woodward house as 1843-1845; however, Lysander Woodward did not purchase the property until 1844, and the obituary of one of his daughters states that he was the builder of the house. Tax assessment records for the Township of Avon indicate that there was an eleven percent increase in the taxable value of the parcel between the 1845 and 1846 tax years, so the house was likely built during that year. It was bound to be in place by 1849, as three of the five Woodward children had been born by that time.

**Lysander Woodward Biography**

Lysander Woodward (1817-1880) was born in Columbia, Tolland County, Connecticut on November 19, 1817, the son of Asahel Woodward (1783-1829) and Harriet House. He migrated with his parents in 1825 to Monroe County, New York, and came from there to Michigan in 1838. He married Peninah Axford Simpson (1825-1894) on May 11, 1843, in Oakland County, and settled near the village of Rochester, where he made his home for the rest of his life.

Woodward bought 80 acres of land in section 10 of the Township of Avon, Oakland County, Michigan from Charles F. Cook (1812-1890) in February 1844. The farm land lay on the north side of the village of Rochester, extending north to today’s Tienken Road. Subsequent purchases by Lysander Woodward expanded his holdings to over 300 acres by 1850. This property was at first judged to be unsuitable for cultivation and was one of the later parcels claimed from the federal government when the land was opened to public sale. It had apparently been little improved when Woodward purchased it, and he set about establishing a modern, working farm that became one of the most prosperous private concerns in the community. Woodward himself was a key player in the Oakland County Agricultural Society, and served as its president. His farm
was nominated in 1867 for a prize awarded by the Oakland County Agricultural Society, and a lengthy description of its attributes was provided in the annual report of the secretary of the state board of agriculture in that year.

It contains 340 acres, of which about 275 acres may be considered under cultivation or improved. Mr. Woodward commenced on this farm about twenty years ago, when the land was in the state that nature had given it, and all the improvements have been made by himself.

Of the house and grounds, the Society's reviewers were generally laudatory, but felt that the grounds of the residence were not quite expansive enough to impress:

The farm house is a modern structure, well planned and economically arranged in the interior. Its location is well chosen, being on a rise of ground, overlooking the main road, and a sufficient distance back to afford room for pleasant ornamental grounds in front. At present, however, we consider the grounds as too narrow, and though in good order and neatly planted with evergreens and flower borders, yet the defect of breadth gives this feature of the surrounding of the mansion connected with a farm of this size, too much the character of a suburban yard.

Woodward provided to the award committee the statement of actual sales from his farm books for the year 1866. He reported $3,800.87 in total sales of agricultural products from his farm, including $1,445.60 for wheat, $474.24 for wool from his flock of about 300 sheep, and $499.80 for pork from his stock of about twenty hogs.

In the end, the Society's award committee was unable to select a single winner from among the three farms nominated for the prize, so they divided the $100 award among the three nominees. Lysander Woodward received $40 in recognition of his successful efforts in modern farming.

Woodward ventured into the field of local politics in 1856 when he was elected Supervisor of the Township of Avon, a position he would reprise in 1876. In 1860, he was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives, where he served one term and two special sessions as the legislator representing the first district of Oakland County. Following the close of the Civil War, he returned to political office at the county level, when he was elected treasurer of Oakland County for two terms.

By all available accounts, Lysander Woodward was highly regarded as a successful
farmer and as a man of integrity, wisdom and foresight. He pushed hard to bring a railroad line through Rochester and helped to organize the necessary local financing to bring the proposal to fruition. He was elected the first president of the Detroit and Bay City Railroad in 1871, and held the position until 1873, when he resigned due to health issues, according to a newspaper report.\(^8\)

Despite an ongoing struggle with asthma, Lysander Woodward accepted an appointment to the state constitutional convention of 1873, and served as president of the convention. (The document drafted by the convention was placed before the voters in the general election of the following year, but was soundly rejected.)

Woodward returned to local government when he once again served as Supervisor of the Township of Avon in 1876-77, and in 1878 made his last foray into politics when he was nominated for lieutenant governor of Michigan by the National Greenback Party. Until this election, Lysander Woodward had aligned himself politically with the Republican Party, but in this election he cast his fortunes with the Greenbackers, who attracted many farmers concerned about the nation's currency policy as well as a number of disaffected Republicans. Although the Greenback Party was successful in electing eighteen Michigan legislators, the top of the ticket lost out to incumbent governor Charles M. Croswell (1825-1886) and Republican lieutenant governor nominee Alonzo Sessions (1810-1886), and Lysander Woodward retired to private life.

Woodward would live only one more year, falling victim to the asthma condition which had plagued him for decades, complicated by the onset of tuberculosis. He died at his home in Rochester on January 14, 1880 at the age of 62. The obituary published in the Rochester Era lauded his character and accomplishments:

Mr. Woodward has for years been one of Avon's most honored and respected citizens, having filled several positions of trust in the gift of the people with faithfulness and honesty. A gentleman of strict integrity, uprightness and good, sound judgement, his counsels were often sought after by many who had faith in him, and who considered his opinions worthy of acceptation. He was a good husband and a loving father, being decidedly a “home man” in the strictest acceptation of that term.\(^9\)

The lengthy tribute went on to say:

The Detroit, Saginaw & Bay City Railroad [sic] owes perhaps to a great extent its existence to the energy, persistency and perseverance of Mr. Woodward,
who not only being among the first to conceive the project, spent much time, hard labor and money in its construction and completion. As a recognition of his services in this direction he was chosen its first President, which position he filled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the Company.\textsuperscript{10}

The funeral of Lysander Woodward was a spectacle such as the village of Rochester had likely not seen before. With three clergymen officiating and a choir providing the music, the funeral was held from the family home on North Main St. That he was held in high regard and considered a first citizen of Rochester was evident in the large participation of the townspeople in his final journey. The \textit{Rochester Era} described the scene:

\begin{quote}
The house was not only crowded, but many who could not get in gathered upon the outside, all anxious to pay their last respects to the honored dead. A beautiful casket with plate glass sides and top, and lined with white satin, contained all that remained of our respected townsman.

... 

The cortege following the remains to the grave was nearly half-a-mile in length and every manifestation of sorrow was expressed upon all sides as it slowly moved towards our beautiful Cemetery, where all that was mortal of Lysander Woodward was tenderly laid to rest.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The pall bearers who carried Woodward’s casket were some of the leading business men and farmers of the community: Joseph Reimer (1825-1896), William H. Barnes (1829-1903), George G. Lomason (1829-1901), Hosea B. Richardson (1806-1880), Jacob Hadley (1845-1913) and Isaac Barwise (1827-1917),\textsuperscript{12} all of whom owed their personal prosperity in part to Woodward, who had brought the first railroad line to Rochester and with it commerce, communication and economic growth.

\textbf{Children of Lysander Woodward}

Lysander Woodward and his wife, Peninah Axford Simpson, were the parents of five children, all born in Rochester, Oakland County, Michigan. The family of three girls and two boys consisted of Harriet Arabella (1845-1893), born May 16, 1845; Emma Catherine (1847-1928), born September 26, 1847; Robert Simpson (1849-1924), born July 21, 1849; Hubert (1853-1899), born November 7, 1853; and Eva (1855-1933), born June 29, 1855. None of the three daughters had any children, and the descendants of Lysander and Peninah Simpson Woodward issue from their sons, Robert and Hubert.\textsuperscript{13}

The eldest child, Harriet, died unmarried at the age of 48 at her parents' home, where
according to her obituary, she lived as a companion to her widowed mother and served as a hostess in the residence “where centered the memories of childhood and youth’s happy hours.”

The second child, Emma, married English-born architect John Scott (1850-1928) in 1874. The couple made their home in Detroit, where Scott was a member of his father’s architecture and engineering firm. After his father’s retirement, John Scott established his own firm, and is best remembered for his design of the 1902 Wayne County Building at 600 Randolph in Detroit, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 (National Register Information System #75000972). He also designed a handsome home as his personal residence at 84 East Ferry Avenue in Detroit; that building is part of the East Ferry Avenue Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 (National Register Information System #80001921). In 1920, John Scott retired from business and he and Emma returned to Rochester, where they lived at the family homestead until their deaths in 1928.

The fourth Woodward child was Hubert, who married Clara H. French (1860-1935) in 1880. Hubert and Clara Woodward had one child, Milton Lysander Woodward (1883-1963).

The youngest child of Lysander and Peninah Simpson Woodward was daughter Eva, who married Arthur Sheldon Parker (1856-1924), a Detroit pharmacist and president of the Detroit Drug Company, in 1883. Following the death of her husband in 1924, Eva Woodward Parker returned to live in her childhood home. Eva Parker is noted for having left a substantial bequest in her estate for the construction of a library building for the Rochester community. Her executor, Henry Wood Axford (1878-1970), saw that this bequest was carried out in 1949 when ground was broken for a new home for the Avon Township Library at the corner of Pine and Fifth streets in Rochester. The new building bore the name Woodward Memorial Library in honor of Eva Woodward Parker’s family name.

The middle child of Lysander and Peninah Simpson Woodward was Robert Simpson Woodward, who rose to national prominence as a scientist and mathematician. He married Martha Grettan Bond (1851-1947) in 1876 and the couple had three children: Robert Simpson Woodward (1879-1949), Karl Wilson Woodward (1881-), and William Lysander Woodward (1885-).

Robert Simpson Woodward attended school in the village of Rochester before going on to earn a civil engineering degree from the University of Michigan in 1872. He worked
on the United States Lake Survey and also served as an assistant astronomer with the
United States Transit of Venus Commission. He then moved on to the U.S. Geological
Survey, where he was chief geographer in charge of the Division of Mathematics, and
there conducted research and published numerous scientific papers.

In 1893, Woodward became Professor of Mechanics and Mathematical Physics at
Columbia University. He remained at Columbia for a dozen years and then accepted the
position of president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, at which time he made
his home in the District of Columbia. He retired from the Carnegie Institution in 1921,
three years before his death. While in Washington, D.C., Robert S. Woodward lived at
1513 16th Street NW in Georgetown. In 1976, this residence was listed as a National
Historic Landmark based upon its historic association with Woodward (National
Historic Landmark System #76002136).

Robert S. Woodward also served as associate editor of the journal *Science* from 1889 to
1924. He was regarded as a leading authority in his field, and the list of his publications,
honors and awards is prestigious and lengthy. He died in Washington D.C. on June 29,
1924 at the age of 74, from lingering ailments after a bout of influenza.

**Subsequent Ownership**

After his father's death, Hubert Woodward sold the family homestead in 1883 to
Ludovic R. Cole (1847-1919), who was Peninah Simpson Woodward's nephew, the son
of her older sister, Mary Swayze Simpson Cole (1820-1888). Peninah Woodward held a
life estate and continued to live in her marital home until her death in 1894. At that
time, the Woodward children bought the property back from Cole for $1000. The sons
then sold their respective interests in the property to their sisters.

Both the Parkers and the Scotts used the Lysander Woodward home as a summer residence, and John
Scott and Arthur Parker apparently took responsibility for the management of the
property. In March of 1913, the two men took out a bold-face advertisement in the
*Rochester Era*, warning the local citizens that they would prosecute anyone caught
dumping rubbish on the roads bordering the Woodward property.

Also, it was during the stewardship of the Parkers and the Scotts that the house was
renovated; the clapboard siding was changed to 8” drop siding and the full-length
columned porch was added to the east elevation. As John Scott was a very prominent
architect and was using the house as his summer residence at the time, the renovation
design is assumed to be his work. One newspaper item suggests that this work may

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have been done in 1898; but in any case, the revisions are seen in all 20th century photographs of the house.

Eva Woodward Parker was the last living Woodward child when she died in 1933, ending the ownership of the property by the Woodward family. Eva Woodward Parker's will left the bulk of her estate in trust for Miss Mary Welters, her maid and faithful employee for 28 years. The income from the trust was to be paid during Welters' lifetime, and upon her death, a bequest of $25,000 was to be paid to Parker's nephew, Milton L. Woodward. The entire residue of the estate was then to be used to fund a new building for the Avon Township Library. Parker left her home furnishings and personal jewelry to her executor, Henry Wood Axford. Welters died in 1947, and the bequest to the public library was realized in 1949.

After the death Eva Woodward Parker, the Lysander Woodward house became the residence of Roy J. McComb (1884-1958) and his wife Elizabeth G. Vowles (1879-1960), both of whom died in the house in 1958 and 1960, respectively. The McComb family had no children, and after her death, the heirs of Elizabeth Vowles McComb sold the property in 1962 to the Pine Tree Apartments. The house was then partitioned into apartments and ceased to be a single family home. In 2011, it is still known as the Pine Tree Apartments.
Bibliography


Michigan. Oakland County. Oakland County tax rolls, 1841-1867. Oakland University Archives, Rochester, MI. FHL microfilms 1928408-1928411 and 1976304-1976307. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Original records also held by Oakland University Archives, Rochester, MI).

Michigan. Detroit. *Detroit Free Press*, 1822-


Appendix

Township of Avon, Oakland County, Michigan
Property Tax Assessments, 1844-1850
Woodward, Pixley and Voorhies Farms Compared

Notes:
1. In 1845, Lysander Woodward acquired an adjacent 80 acre parcel, which was separately taxed; in the 1847 assessment, the two parcels were combined for tax purposes.
2. In 1848, John Voorhies sold his 80 acre parcel, so tax data for that parcel for the years 1849 and 1850 is unknown.

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<th>Tax Year</th>
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</table>

Notes:
1. In 1845, Lysander Woodward acquired an adjacent 80 acre parcel, which was separately taxed; in the 1847 assessment, the two parcels were combined for tax purposes.
2. In 1848, John Voorhies sold his 80 acre parcel, so tax data for that parcel for the years 1849 and 1850 is unknown.

Taxable Value Comparison 1844-1850
Woodward, Pixley and Voorhies farms

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Artist’s drawing of the Lysander Woodward farmstead on North Main Street in Rochester and portraits of Lysander and Peninah Simpson Woodward, from History of Oakland County Michigan by Samuel W. Durant, 1877. This is the earliest known depiction of the house.
Woodward siblings on the front porch of the Lysander Woodward residence, 1385 North Main, Rochester. The columned porch running the length of the front elevation has not yet been added at this time. Shown from left to right are: Robert S. Woodward, Hubert Woodward, Emma Woodward Scott, Eva Woodward Parker, John Scott and Arthur S. Parker. (From the collection of Rochester Hills Public Library)
This photo is likely taken in 1895, as the Gordon Setter shown in the photo is referenced as having been at the Woodward farm in the summer of 1895.
Real photo postcard of the Lysander Woodward House taken about 1915, when the Emma Woodward Scott and her husband were in residence. The columned porch has been added by this time. (Note: Photographer mis-labeled this image as “Geo. Scott’s Res.” rather than “John Scott’s Res.”)

View of arbor on Woodward House grounds, taken between 1912 and 1924. Some of the support pillars remain on the property in 2011.
Lysander Woodward Residence, 1385 North Main St., east (front) elevation, taken 22 May 2010

Lysander Woodward Residence, 1385 North Main St., south elevation, taken 22 May 2010
Lysander Woodward Residence, 1385 North Main St., north elevation, taken 22 May 2010

Lysander Woodward Residence, 1385 North Main St., porch and garden gate detail, taken 22 May 2010
Endnotes

1 Oakland County, Michigan, Oakland County tax rolls, 1841-1867, assessment records of Avon Township, 1844-1850; Oakland University Archives, Rochester, MI; FHL microfilms 1928408-1928411 and 1976304-1976407.
6 Ibid., p.346.
7 Ibid., p.349.
8 “Colorado,” Detroit Free Press, January 24, 1875.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Serrell, p.102.
14 “Death of Miss Woodward,” Rochester Era, June 16, 1893.
15 Serrell, p.102.
18 Rochester Era, March 28, 1913.
19 “Maid is Left Bulk of Parker Estate,” Rochester Clarion, February 24, 1933.