

Mohonk Preserve, Inc.Historical/Cultural Note No. 25Wood as a Shawangunk Resource

Sources of Lumber Used in Mohonk House  
 Uses for Wood at Mohonk  
 Wood Products Exported

by Daniel Smiley

June 1987

This subject is of perennial interest. Recent writing about Mohonk history has tended to perpetuate certain incomplete and incorrect information that was available in Mohonk publications regarding the origin of the wooden materials used in the House. I suspect that the idea that it was pleasant to think of native trees becoming components of Mohonk House became father to the thought for writers. On the other hand, the Shawangunk forests were not depleted in the construction of Mohonk buildings.

In 1952, with the help of John Yeaple, head carpenter at that time, I produced a one-page summary "Woods Used in Mohonk House." Recent research of material in Mohonk Archives has clarified the sources of woods used in the House.

The wood that was utilized for a section of Mohonk House tended to represent a balance of factors of the moment, such as: a) availability of kinds of trees in the forests owned by Mohonk at the time; b) off-season building time; c) construction needs, quantity and quality; and d) costs.

Discussion of 19th Century Utilization Factors at Mohonk:

A. The fact that ash trees are currently common on the mountain cannot justify the assumption that local ash lumber was what went into the framing of the Central staircase in 1888. Most of the early Mohonk land purchases were along the crest of the ridge. The woodlands on these lands represented trees growing on poor sites. They had been subjected to forest fires and exploitation for tanbark (hemlocks) and charcoal (hardwoods).

B. During its first five decades Mohonk operated as a summer resort. Thus, building construction was relegated to the winter months so as not to lose income from guests.

C. Family letters of the 19th century indicate that Mohonk's early buildings did not have the benefit of a professional architect. Plans for a new section of the House would be discussed by the Smiley twins in the summer and fall. A boss carpenter contractor would be hired in the fall. Design details and materials would be worked out by Alfred while construction was in progress. This sort of procedure obviously precluded stock-piling specified materials and in turn ruled out the possibility of utilizing native woods because of the time involved in: harvesting, sawing, seasoning for a year, and hauling to a town for the final milling.

D. Comparative costs for that time are not available; but the combination of time, quality and quantity needed seems probably to account for the absence of Shawangunk woods in Mohonk Mountain House.

As the foregoing was being researched, the obvious question arose: if native trees were not being used in Mohonk buildings, what part did wood, and other forest products, play in the economy of the Shawangunks?

The following is a preliminary report on the answer to the question raised above. It involves a dichotomy, for it includes: a) woods that were harvested in the Shawangunks, whether they were used at Mohonk, or became a part of the economy of Ulster County; and b) wood products that came from outside Ulster County and were used at Mohonk.

Lumber Used in Mohonk House

\* = non-native

<u>Building</u>	<u>Framing</u>	<u>Floor</u>	<u>Trim</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Rock 1879	Hemlock	Hemlock	White Pine (painted)	Porches - Fir *
New Stone 1902	-	-	Yellow Birch * (Red?)	Porches - Western Cedar * Fir * Shelving-Western Cedar *
Old Stone 1899	Hemlock	Yel.Pine *	Chestnut	Porches-Western Cedar * Fir *
Central 1887 1898	Hemlock Yel.Pine *	Wh. Pine	White Pine	Porches - Fir Central Stairs-Ash, Yellow Pine, floor
Parlor 1899	Yel.Pine * (steel)	Yel.Pine *	Red Birch *	Trim: Mahogany Stain *
Office (Lake Lounge) 1899	Yel.Pine * (steel)	Oak	Chestnut	Porches-Yel.Pine *, Fir *
Grove 1892	Hemlock	Yel.Pine *	White Pine	Porches-Fir * Stairs-Yel.Pine *
Dining Room 1892 1910	Hemlock	Yel.Pine *	White Pine	
Kitchen 1892	Hemlock Fir *	White Pine		(painted)

Wood Products and Their Uses at MohonkBarn Repairs

Horse stall planking  
 Elm  
 Mow Poles (farms)  
 hardwood (sp.?)

Barrels

Tight cooperage  
 Staves - oak (sp.)  
 Heading - red oak  
 Hoops - hardwoods  
 Slack cooperage (?sp.)  
 Hoops  
 hardwood saplings  
 gray birch (for salt  
 fish barrels)

Baseball Bats

White ash

Boat Wharf Planking

Western cedar  
 Yellow pine (treated)

Bridges

Posts  
 Chestnut  
 hemlock  
 yellow pine  
 Sleepers, Stringers  
 chestnut  
 chestnut Oak  
 hemlock  
 fir  
 yellow Pine  
 Cribbing  
 chestnut  
 locust  
 Plank  
 chestnut  
 red oak  
 hemlock  
 fir

Charcoal

(Some made on the premises,  
 some purchased from the  
 G. I. Treyz Company at  
 Cook's Falls)

Used at Mohonk for broiling  
 meat, heating lead (for  
 pipe joints), and for  
 blacksmith shop forge

Christmas Trees

hemlock  
 Scotch pine  
 red pine  
 red cedar  
 Douglas fir (planted)  
 white spruce "

Concrete-Form Material

chestnut

Cordwood

For Mohonk fireplaces, stoves  
 and power plant

For sale to Rosendale Cement  
 for use in cement kilns

For shipment by canal to brick-  
 yards at Kingston

Derricks - Masts and Booms

spruce

Diving Boards

hickory

Fence Posts

red cedar  
 chestnut  
 locust

Fireplace Wood

Hardwood (used at Mohonk, for  
 export to Paris, for retail  
 sale in New York City)

White birch (bundles of fire-  
 place wood sold in Mohonk  
 Gift Shop)

Flats for Greenhouses

Materials salvaged from melon  
 crates

Fruit Containers

Elm bolts for baskets and boxes

Furniture (made at Mohonk)

red oak

Horse Medicine

White oak bark

Hunting Notices

Salvaged from orange crate  
ends

Insulation

Ice houses  
tanbark (until c.1900)  
sawdust  
Deep-freeze (electric)  
white ash chips

Kitchen Equipment

Sink drainboards  
white wood  
Bakeshop peels  
Handle - ash  
Blade - white wood

Lath for Plastering

hemlock

Laundry Wash-wheel repair

Oregon Sugar pine (special  
quality)

Log Cabin - Logs

chestnut  
red oak

Railings - Steps and Ties

Chestnut  
red cedar  
red pine (treated)  
locust  
hemlock (treated)

Scaffolding

Uprights  
chestnut  
Planks  
spruce

Shad Net Poles

hickory (sp.)

Shingles (none native as far as  
known)

cedar  
cyprus  
redwood

Sign Boards

white pine

Sled Runners (used for bringing  
cordwood out of the woods)  
hard maple

Stone Boats

hard maple  
(Sawed with an angle at one end)

Summerhouses and Benches

chestnut - 1874  
red cedar  
red pine (treated)

Survey Stakes

Saplings cut in the woods  
Scrap lumber

Tanning

hemlock bark  
(peeled here and sold)

Temples for Building Construction

chestnut

Tool Handles

Ax - hickory  
Bullwhip - hickory  
(used in millstone cutting  
to hold bullpoint)

Tugboat Fenders

tupelo  
(before discarded auto-  
mobile tires came into  
use)

Wagon and Wheel Repairs

Fellies, spokes and rims  
hickory  
Wagon bodies (?)  
Brake shoes  
hard maple

Walking Sticks

hardwood saplings, striped  
maple preferred  
(made at Mohonk and  
branded with the  
name "Mohonk")

chestnut sprouts

(numbered series made by Mohonk  
guest, Mr. Betts, during his  
walks and inscribed "Mohonk -  
P.B.P." (Pro Bono Publico -  
for the good of the public)

"Witness" Trees - mentioned in  
deeds, for reference points  
pitch pine  
oak (chestnut or red)  
"Rosenbaum" maple

**Acknowledgements:**

The following persons contributed to this report in various ways:

John C. Yeaple  
Albert K. Smiley (2nd)  
Alton Quick  
Francis L. Purcell  
Helmut G. Horn  
Alice Cross  
Paul C. Huth