



KNOW YOUR ROOTS

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MAGNOLIA

In our Elson ancestry is Richard Elson, the Revolutionary soldier, and it is from his family that this month's subject was chosen. Our branch begins with Richard's son William. (As a reminder – William was the father of our Mary Elizabeth Elson, grandmother of Harry Elson Durland.) But this month's Elson story begins with an older brother of William, John Harris Elson, a very distant uncle to be sure, but still a part of our ancestry.

I won't go through all the begets, but suffice it to say that a son of John Harris Elson, also named Richard, had a most interesting life. It began in 1833 when, with a friend, he purchased land in Stark County, Ohio for twelve hundred dollars. This is the land involved in our story.

It was virgin territory and didn't have a name. The two of them, Richard and his friend, thought for a long time and debated about forty names but they finally decided that their village would be called Magnolia, and today it is still Magnolia. According to legend, Richard had seen magnolia trees in bloom in the south and they so impressed him with their beautiful white blossoms that only the name of Magnolia would suffice.

Richard laid out the land and saved a portion of it for his new village, Magnolia. One of the first things he erected in 1834 was the Magnolia Mills, a place to house and prepare the products from his land. Since this was all undiscovered land, he had to crawl on his hands and knees to prepare the site for the building. It was a big undertaking, but when it was ready he then began to breed sheep and consequently became one of the most influential men in Stark County, and one of the largest and best sheep breeders in the state of Ohio. The Elson Mill became a necessity to the town, which flourished as a result.



He had a singular method of loaning out sheep to the neighboring farms and in return he received one-half the wool and one-half the increase in the number of sheep. This proved to be most beneficial, and during his life he acquired a huge fortune. He died at age 82 a very wealthy man, was known for transforming a wilderness into a garden of civilization and beauty, and is honored as one of the pioneers of Stark County.

Perhaps you might think this is the end of the story but it is only the beginning. One of his sons, Augustus, began working for his father and in 1851 worked at the mill which was still owned by his father. It had become badly run down through long and

constant use and the machinery was old and in bad shape. Augustus made a deal with his father and took over the renovation. He tore out all the old machinery, and the picture above shows you how it looks today, still in the family and still a working mill.

While his father was extremely prosperous in the sheep business, his son Augustus became equally prosperous with the newly refitted mill and today the plant is one of the most modern, turning out flour of unexcelled quality.

Credit for the prosperity of Magnolia, the village named because of a beautiful tree from the South, is due to each of these Elsons, but the story is not over yet. The Elsons are still prominent in Magnolia in yet another way.

A few years back I became acquainted with a distant Elson cousin by the name of Rowena Drennan (by the way, she is the one who told me about the Elson Readers) who told me about the Elson Inn Bed and Breakfast in Magnolia, Ohio. I was unaware, not only of Magnolia, but also that there was a bed and breakfast in the town.

It was easy to find and is rated very highly, and as you might imagine is run by a descendant of the Magnolia village founder. It is a beautifully restored Victorian mansion and its owner calls it the Elson Inn Bed and Breakfast.



So if you are ever in the vicinity of northeastern Ohio and want to look up a distant relative from the Elson clan, visit the Elson Inn Bed and Breakfast in Magnolia. It sits next door to the flour and feed mill shown on the first page. It is also located on a canal and you can find them both on the National Register. The inn itself is furnished with original Elson family pieces. There are marble fireplaces and leaded stained glass windows. It is the home of the owners and

they have kept it as authentic as possible down to the black walnut woodwork and parquet floors. Since it is a bed and breakfast inn, it has all the amenities including a sumptuous breakfast.

This is the end of the saga of the Elsons in Magnolia, Stark County, Ohio. I titled this newsletter Magnolia because it started from a son of our distant uncle John Harris Elson, brother to our William, and continued with his Elson descendants through the years from the first one who built a little town that flourished.

In 2001 Rowena Drennan, the one who told me about Magnolia, sent me this picture with the message, "*This is a picture of me taken in Ohio when we went to the Elson Bed and Breakfast a few years ago. That is A. R. Elson, present owner of the Elson Mill and Bed and Breakfast, descended from the Elson who started the town of Magnolia, Ohio, and the mill that has been in operation since 1834.*"



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