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# Sam Wooster was an eccentric character

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The following story is taken from "Pioneer History of Orleans County" compiled in 1871 by Arad Thomas. The presence of this excerpt gives us a feeling of life during the early settlement of this area in the first quarter of the 19th century. "Oliver Booth was a well-known tavern keeper on the Ridge Road in Gaines. He came here from Wayne County in the spring of 1811, and settled on the farm north of the Ridge and east of the Oak Orchard Road in the village of Gaines. He cleared a farm and built a double log house, with a huge chimney in the middle. Here he kept tavern a number of years.

"His house was always full of company. Travelers on the Ridge Road stopped here because it was a tavern and there was no other. Here he dispensed a vast amount of whiskey — for everybody was thirsty in those days — and were not acquainted with the proverbial filthiness of the chert.

"After Gaines had become a village, and laid claims to the



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county seat, and people had come in who wanted more style, and whose stomachs could not stand such fare as Booth's tavern supplied, another tavern was opened and Booth sold out and moved away. He finally settled in Michigan where he died.

"No description of Booth or his tavern would be complete without including Sam Wooster. Sam's father lived in the neigh-

borhood, and he (Sam) then a great lazy boy, strayed up to Booth's tavern, where by hanging about he occasionally got a taste of Booth's whisky in consideration of bringing in wood for the fire and doing a few other chores. For these services and the pleasure of his company, Booth gave him what he ate and drank, with a place to sleep on the bar-room floor. His clothes did not cost much. He

never wore a hat of any sort, seldom had on stockings or shoes. Nobody can remember that he wore a shirt, and his coats and pants were such as came to him, nobody could tell how or from whence.

"Sam never washed his face and hands, or combed his head and his general appearance, shirtless and shoeless, with his great black, frowzy head bare, his pants ragged and torn, and his coat, if he had any, minus one sleeve, or half the skirt, to one who didn't know him might befit a crazy prisoner just escaped from Bedlam.

"Yet Sam was not a fool or crazy. His wit was keen and ready, and his jokes timely and sharp. He would not work or do

anything which required much effort any way. He was a good fisher, however, and with his old friend Booth, he would sit patiently by the hour and angle in the Oak Orchard, or any other stream that had fish, perfectly content, if he had an occasional nibble at his hook.

"One year while he lived in Gaines, some wag for the fun of the thing nominated him for overseer of highways in the Gaines village district and he was elected. He told the people they had elected him thinking he was too lazy to attend to the business, and would let them satisfy their assessments by mere nominal labor on the road; but they would find themselves much mistaken and they did.

Sam warned them to work as the law directed. He superintended everything vigorously, and every man and team and tool on the highway within his beat had to do its whole duty promptly that year at least.

"Although Sam loved whisky and drank it whenever it was given to him, for he never had money to buy anything, he never got drunk. He never quarreled or stole or did any other mischief. Bad as he looked, and lazy and dirty as he was, he was harmless. When Mr. Booth sold out and moved to Michigan, Sam went with him and lived in his family afterwards.

Notice: Tour of Mt. Albion cemetery at 2 p.m. Oct. 21.