

The following was presented by Board Member Ken Lab at the Hall of Distinction Induction Ceremony of the Dover Historical Society, on Sunday, April 28, 2019.

James Rees

As members of the Dover Historical Society and custodians of the Reeves Home, we tend to focus our historic perspectives on how they relate to Jeremiah Reeves and his affairs. An initial look at James Rees may cause one to conclude that he was fortunate that his sister married Jeremiah Reeves. In fact, a closer examination of James Rees reveals that Jeremiah Reeves was lucky that HE married Mr. Rees' sister!

James Rees was born in South Wales in 1854, the son and grandson of builders and cabinet makers. At the age of 14 he began working alongside them. He accepted positions with other firms in this craft and eventually found himself in Liverpool, England. Here, at night, he decided to study building construction and drawing at Shane Street College. Today this field of study would be architecture or more likely, engineering.

His hard work and natural abilities landed Mr. Rees a coveted position with Jackson & Graham, the largest high end cabinet makers in London. This gave his work the opportunity to be recognized and awarded throughout London and Paris.

At the ripe old age of 25, James Rees returned to South Wales and went into business with his father, respectfully calling the firm David Rees and Son. They specialized in high class work such as carved pulpits, lecterns and church pews. Likely, his work exists today.

In the summer of 1892, James Rees, along with his wife Amelia and their young family immigrated to the United States and were welcomed to Canal Dover by Mr. Rees' sister, Jane Reeves. He took a position at the Dover Rolling Mill, owned by his brother-in-law, Jeremiah Reeves. As a carpenter, he held various positions there, serving as General Superintendent the last 3 years, prior to the mills sale to the American Tin Plate Company.

It is likely that it was here, during James Rees' tenure at the Rolling Mill that Jeremiah Reeves recognized his work ethic and his business savvy and realized Mr. Rees would be an integral part of his future. James Rees would serve as Vice-President of Reeves Manufacturing, Vice-President of Dover Forge and Iron Company and also one of the first officers of Reeves Banking and Trust, serving as Vice-President there also.

After the sale of the Rolling Mill, James Rees decided to reenter the building trade. In 1901 he remodeled the Reeves Home. His cabinetry and carving skills are evident today in the grandfather clock, mantels and woodwork in the Home. Mr. Rees is also generally credited with the construction of the Reeves Home Carriage House.

In 1903 The Union Lumbar Company was formed, with James Rees as President. The firm had facilities in New Philadelphia and Dover, serving both retail and wholesale markets. They were also one of the largest contractors in this part of Ohio.

The Union Lumbar Company was a pioneer in the manufacture of Portland Cement Building Blocks. These were deemed superior to other construction techniques of the periods, producing a drier, better insulated, fire-proof structure. The distinctive looking concrete blocks are still evident throughout Dover and New Philadelphia on homes, porches and foundations. James Rees' own residence on Iron Ave. was the first to build with these blocks. It still stands today.

The concrete block business would become the most recognizable legacy to the Rees name, with the Rees Cast Stone Company, located near the Dover Interstate Exchange, until its sale in 1954.

James Rees and his wife Amelia had a large family, 6 boys and 3 girls. After Amelia's passing in 1922, James married Elizabeth A. Lewis. James Rees died in 1932 at the age of 78.