

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### BABE WOOD

#### From Hop Farmer to Cadillac Dealer

Built in 1892, “Woodhaven” is a lovely two-story, white clapboard home proudly perched on the east side of Highway One in Bodega Bay’s “Old Town” or “Village.” This is the story as told by “Babe” Wood,\* whose family built Woodhaven as their summer home.

Sam Talmadge, Babe’s grandfather, was born in 1875. He and his family enjoyed the town of “Bay,” today known as Bodega Bay, and built several homes in the Village in the late 1800’s. Sam Talmadge built Woodhaven in 1892. Across the street his son, Babe’s Uncle Ronnie, built a gabled house on the bank of the bay with a long wharf, in the area known now as Porta Bodega. Aunt Ella, Babe’s grandmother’s oldest daughter, built a house next to the Creamery, on the west side of Highway One, accessed by the same driveway that still goes down to the old Creamery. Babe’s parents, Frank Wood and Hattie Mae, built a house on the shore below Diekmann’s. Babe’s uncle, Peter Slusser built a house in 1914 that Babe envied. Called the “tank house” it had a 2,000-gallon water tank. Babe especially envied it because his own family carried water up in buckets to his own house.

Where Diekmann’s is now, there was a two-story hotel. Babe recalled it had a big dining room, a bar, a big dance hall and stage. Stables were below the hotel, on the beach. For dances they brought their own piano, played by his older sister. Babe played saxophone, his brother played drums, and his younger sister did the entertaining. Good times were had by all.

Babe, named after his grandfather Samuel Talmadge, was born in Sebastopol in 1901. An avid baseball fan, Babe pitched for Santa Rosa High School. When his grandfather retired, he gave his Hop Farm, located by Mark West Creek, to his daughter, Babe’s mother, Hattie Mae. Babe’s grandfather and later his stepfather, Frank Wood, were successful hop farmers. Babe enjoyed farming and looked forward to a career as a farmer.

In the late 1920’s, Babe’s parents, Hattie May and Frank Wood bought an REO Flying Cloud. Babe proudly introduced the car in Santa Rosa. A natural entrepreneur, Babe quickly bought the entire stock. He sold so many REO Speedwagons that REO Motor Car Company, in Lansing, Michigan, created an advertisement with a picture of Babe on a REO Speedwagon in the Wood Family hopyard.

Babe opened his own car dealership in 1926. Babe’s son, Samuel Talmadge “Sam” Wood, Jr., born in 1935, took over the car dealership in 1971, but Babe continued to play a role in selling cars for many years after. Locals might even remember Babe Wood’s enthusiastic TV ads in the 1970’s, promoting his Cadillac/Pontiac/Mazda dealership on Auto Row in Santa Rosa. Fifty years later in 1976, the business moved to Corby Ave.

Babe died in 2004 at the age of 103. Sam Jr. eventually sold the dealership to Hansel Auto Group in 2007. Sam Jr. passed away in August 2022.

\*Note: FROM THE ARCHIVES is curated by Robin Rudderow. A good part of this story is Babe’s own telling in a 1994 interview by members of the Rancho Bodega Historical Society.

