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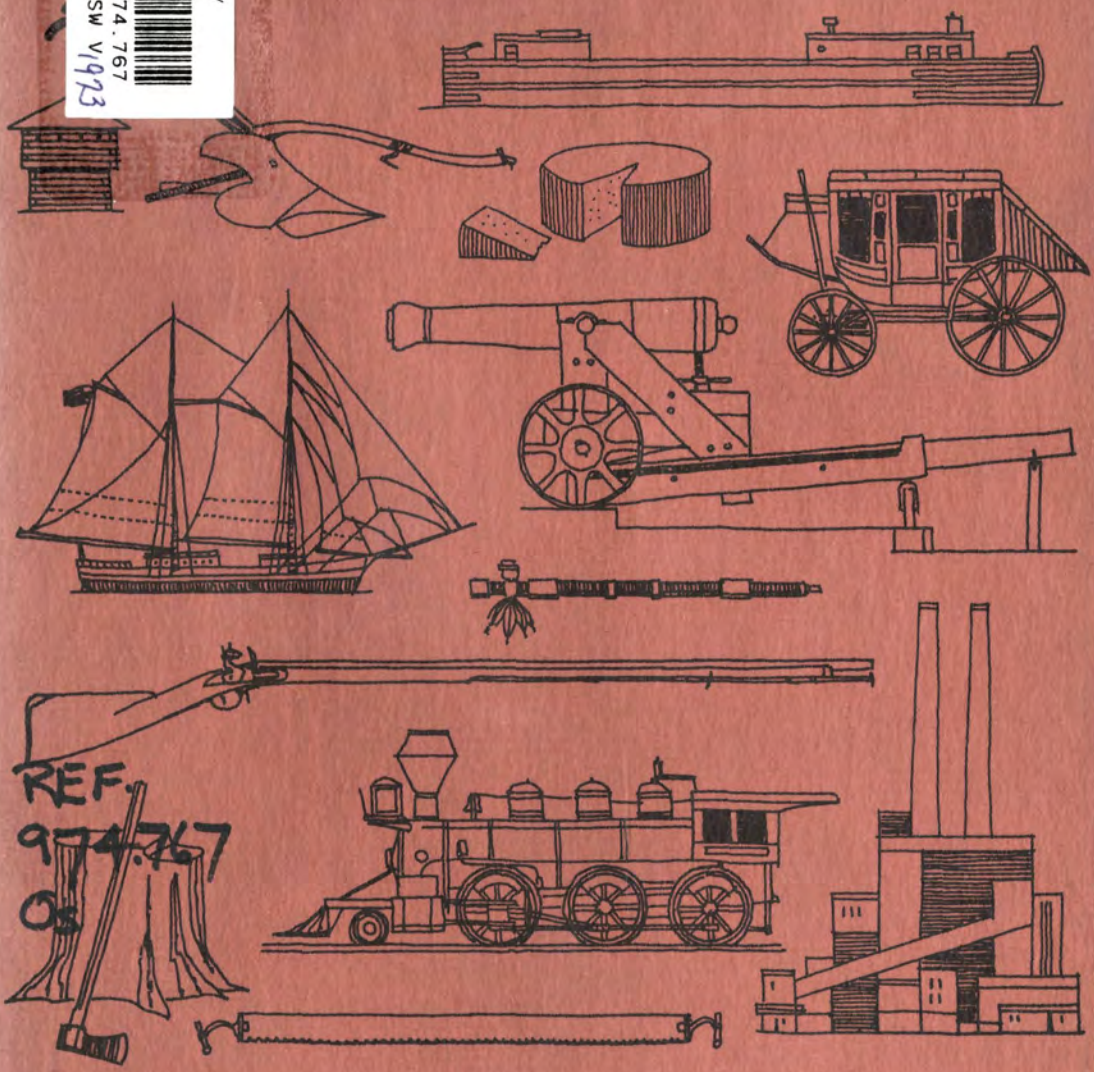
Oswego County Historical Society



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OSWEGO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thirty-fourth Annual Publication

Oswego County Historical Society
Richardson-Bates House
135 East Third Street
Oswego, New York 13126

Founded in 1896

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Frances Breads

Dedication

Every once in a while the world is blessed by the presence of an unusual human being. The Oswego County community to so blessed in Frances Dann Breads.

Frances lives in Fulton, where for many years, she owned and operated McKinstry's, a South First Street emporium dealing in quality men's wear. Business has been only one facet of her life, however. She has given countless hours of thought and service to many organizations, especially to those whose purpose is the helping of her fellow man. The Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of American Colonists, Salvation Army Auxiliary, Fulton Women's Club, First Presbyterian Church, Albert Lindley Lee Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, all have been the recipients of her time and attention as an active member and as an officer.

One of Frances' most constant interests over the years has been the Oswego County Historical Society. Frances came to the Society as a very young girl with her late mother, Mrs. Frank Elliott, who was long a member of the Society and its Board of Managers. Frances herself is a distinguished Trustee of the Society, but her involvement does not end with attending Board meetings. She is here often hostessing, advising, acting on vital committees, supporting Society activities and functions, promoting Society interests in every way, giving her time and sharing her treasures with no thought other than to bring some pleasure to others. A chief advocate of the growth and progress of the Society for as long as anyone who knows her can remember, Frances has done it all with generosity, intelligence, humor and grace.

We of the Oswego County Historical Society are indeed fortunate to be a part of Frances' life; we are proud of her as a sterling associate. And so, it is our privilege to dedicate this *Journal,* with our affection and deep appreciation, to Frances M. Breads.

Katherine Carter
October, 1974

President's Message

To some people the story of America is identified only with places like Plymouth and Valley Forge, Sutter's Mill and Appomattox, and a myriad of other locations that glitter in the sometimes remote pages of history books.

To residents of Oswego County the American past is a more intimate experience. Early struggles for control of strategic waterways and ultimately of a major portion of the continent as well as the first attempts to establish farmsteads and villages required cooperative effort to support and expand individual initiative. Whether a George Scriba or an Asa Rice, virtually every pioneering spirit found working with family and neighbors to be indispensible to the achievement of his goals.

Throughout the later years of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the people of Oswego County followed the fortunes of agriculture, forest resource utilization, transportation and commerce, retail businesses and trades, and manufacturing. On the long road from a fur-trading outpost of the British Empire to power generating facilities to serve much of the northeastern United States, Oswego County and its communities have reflected to an unusual degree many of the significant activities of America–the opening of the frontier and the winning of the land, the mastery of major bodies of water through ships and canals, the integration of diverse nationality groups with their varying religious beliefs and social customs, the evolution of new farming practices, and most recently, the growing impact of urbanization and industrialization.

Today, Oswego County's citizens live in a rapidly changing, technologically-oriented world that will place even heavier demands upon both cooperative effort and individual initiative as well as our ability to couple them effectively. Together with the rest of the nation's populace, we find ourselves concerned with uncertainties ranging from the aftermath of the most unpopular war in at least a century to an international energy crisis and complex domestic problems relating to our urban communities, the protection of our environment, elemental questions of justice and opportunity for all citizens, and the exercise of moral integrity and regard for law on the part of those in high elected and appointed governmental posts.

It is against the background of these disquieting times that persons and organizations involved with historical activity face an almost unequaled opportunity to contribute to knowledge of the past, to a realistic appreciation of the successes and failures as well as the as yet unfinished work of the American experiment.

Toward these ends the Oswego County Historical Society pledges its energies to improve the collection, the preservation, the advancement, and the dissemination of knowledge about Oswego County's past during the forthcoming Bicentennial period. We warmly welcome to the common cause of local history the efforts of two new historical organizations in the County, the Schroeppel Historical Society and the Half-Shire Historical Society, and extend to them as well as to the Fort Brewerton Historical Society, the Heritage Foundation of Oswego, the municipally-appointed historians throughout the County, and all locally named Bicentennial committees a sincere invitation to continue and expand cooperative relationships.

Respectfully submitted,

WALLACE F. WORKMASTER
President

"Bound by Duty:" Abolitionists in Mexico, New York 1830-1842

*Judith Wellman**

"To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America," the petition began.

> The petition of the undersigned citizens of the Town of Mexico County of Oswego and State of New York humbly sheweth, That your petitioners feel themselves bound by their duty to their Country, to their fellow men, and to their God, to protest against the continuance of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia, and to pray your honorable bodies to exercise your Constitutional powers for their immediate abolition.
>
> Remembering that the traffic in human flesh, when practiced on the Ocean, has been solemnly declared piracy by your own, and that it is so considered by almost all Christian nations, your petitioners do most earnestly implore that Slavery the necessary cause of the Traffic, may no longer be permitted to exist in the Capital of this Republic.
>
> Dated at Mexico Sept. 1835[1]

The solemnity and obvious sincerity of these words pleased the group of newly converted Mexico abolitionists. Starr Clark, a prominent store owner, stove dealer, and tinware manufacturer in Mexicoville, was the first to step forward. With a delicate flourish he signed his name at the head of the list. After him came Asa Beebe, a foundryman and a "stern, inflexible" deacon of the Mexicoville Presbyterian Church; John Turk, John Bennett, Joseph M. Barrows,

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*Professor Wellman teaches local and regional history at SUNY, Oswego. She is a native of western New York and received her doctorate from the University of Virginia in 1974.

and John Wickware, all local farmers; Edwin Huntington, millwright; Orson Ames, blacksmith and tanner in Mexicoville; Benjamin Gregory, Jr., also a tanner; and seventy other residents of Mexico township, well over ten per cent of the total voting population.[2]

By 1835, when local abolitionists sent their first petition, Mexico township contained 3138 persons. Most of these were scattered fairly evenly across the area in family-owned farms. Three to five hundred of them lived in the village of Mexicoville, and a few more (perhaps four hundred in all) were clustered in the villages of Prattsville (now Prattham), Union Square (now Maple View), and Colosse.[3]

Mexico township (along with the rest of Oswego County) remained a virtual wilderness for several years after its initial settlement. But during the 1830's, hundreds of new settlers arrived, attracted by fertile lands and good business opportunities. Over one thousand more people lived in the township in 1840 than in 1830, an increase of almost forty per cent.[4]

Most of these settlers probably came to Mexico along one of the main stage roads that criss-crossed the township. A traveler going west from Rome (on present routes 13 and 126) crossed the main Syracuse-Watertown route (the present route 11) at Union Square and passed through Mexicoville on the way.

The alternate route from Rome (the present route 69) entered Mexico township at Colosse and connected at Mexicoville with the road to Oswego (the present route 104). This through traffic supported a thriving hotel business in Mexicoville, Union Square and Colosse.

Despite its phenomenal growth, Mexico township continued to be largely an agricultural area. In 1835, in contrast to several other Oswego County townships, most of the land suitable for farming in Mexico had been cleared and improved. And in 1845, over half (53%) of the adult male population were farmers.[5]

The four villages provided supportive services—small industries, retail stores, hotels, and so forth—to the surrounding agricultural area and to the continuing stream of travelers. In 1836, Mexicoville was by far the largest community in the township. It had about forty houses, three churches, an academy, three stores, and two taverns. It also included several industries—a grist mill, an oil mill, a carding and cloth dressing mill, and two tanneries. Prattsville, about three miles east of Mexicoville, was much smaller. It had fifteen houses and a store. Union Square had a thriving hotel as well as a store and seventeen houses. And Colosse, in the far southeast corner of the township, had one Baptist church, two stores, one tavern, and twenty houses.[6]

Mexicoville reached its dominant position in the township for two main reasons. First, the village was located on the increasingly important Rome-Oswego road; and second, it was situated at the

junction of two main creeks–Black Creek and Salmon Creek. These creeks sustained mills and tanneries which provided basic necessities for nearby farmers.[7]

Throughout the nineteenth century, Mexicoville continued to be rooted in the agricultural district around it. Because it was not on the canal and because it had no unusual natural resources, it could not hope to become much more than what it was in the 1830's–a prosperous but relatively small village.

As Mexico's settlers began to carve homes out of the wilderness, they relied on missionary groups back east to help set up churches in the new area. Missionaries sent out by these societies constantly bemoaned pioneer behavior. In 1816, one such missionary (David Dixon, who later became minister for the Mexico Presbyterian Church) toured Oswego and Jefferson Counties for the Western Female Missionary Society. To him, the area was a moral wasteland. For want to more missionaries, he reported,

> many towns and villages lie waste. The Sabbath is unknown or disregarded. Intemperance, profanity, litegation /*sic*/, and other immoralities abound. Children are growing up in heathenism, and souls are fast ripening for perdition.[8]

The people of Mexico township refused to remain for long in this ungodless state. They set up three of the earliest churches in Oswego County–the Baptist Church at Colosse in 1807, the Methodist Church in 1808, and the Presbyterian Church in 1810.[9]

More than any other institution except the common schools, these churches served to organize, socialize and educate a frontier population. Church members tried to instill discipline and provide every encouragement for righteous living–in themselves, in their children, and in their communities. In Mexico township as elsewhere, they investigated all personal back-sliding. In Colosse, the Baptists dealt with offenses ranging from failure to attend church, to drunkenness, dancing, stealing, and swearing. In Mexicoville and Prattsville, the Presbyterians conscientiously charged their fellow members with many of the same offenses, plus a few more.[10] Concerned with the behavior of others as well as themselves, church members also established Sunday schools, responded to revivals (in 1821 and 1831), and supported missionary efforts.

Through this energetic activity, church groups created in most of Mexico township an orderly, church-going, temperate society. Union Square was the only exception. In 1831, a visitor reported that that small village was "a notoriously wicked place the seat of Universalism and the thoroughfare of sabbath breaking intemperance and opposition to religion."[11]

Besides churches, Mexico developed one other cultural institution—its school system—more completely than did the neighboring townships. In 1845, Mexico township had eighteen common schools.[12] Though three other townships (Oswego, Richland, and Scriba) had more school buildings than did Mexico, none of them listed as many pupils on their rolls or had as many in attendance each day. In addition to the public schools, Mexico township supported the first academy in the county, the Rensselaer-Oswego Academy.[13]

This, then, was Mexico in the 1830's. It had the fourth largest population of any township in Oswego County. Its major village—Mexicoville—was closely tied to the surrounding agricultural area. It had developed strong economic, educational, and religious institutions, and it prided itself on these. As one impressed visitor wrote in 1831, Mexico was "the most important town in the County for wealth, influence, & intelligence."[14] This was the township that responded so warmly to abolitionism in 1835.

Sometime during 1834 or 1835, residents of Mexico township hosted their first abolitionist meeting, the first not only in the township but in the county as well.[15] Gathered in the Colosse Baptist Church were some of the most prominent people in the town—the judge of the county court, the town clerk, the county treasurer, a member of the state assembly, and local Baptist, Methodist, and Unitarian ministers. Most of them were hostile to abolitionism. Only Alfred Wells, called by his neighbors "Quaker" Wells, spoke out for the new idea. Responding to the suggestion that another debate be held, Wells asked James C. Jackson, a local farmer, and Algernon Savage, a district school teacher, to help argue his case.[16]

For six nights, Wells, Savage, and Jackson debated their opponents in a nearby school house. They argued two propositions—first, "that American slavery is a sin," and second, "that it ought to be immediately abolished." When the audience finally voted, late Saturday night, they agreed unanimously on the first point, that slavery was a sin. On the second proposition, however, they tied. Since the chairman, the Baptist minister, was well-known as a pro-slavery man, he surprised everyone when he cast his deciding vote in favor of immediate abolition.

Savage and Jackson found themselves in demand as anti-slavery speakers all over the county. Contrary to their Presbyterian upbringing, they often found themselves speaking on Sunday afternoons. One Sabbath day, they slipped away from the Prattsville Presbyterian Church, just after morning meeting, to argue at a school house gathering that either "those who claimed Biblical

Standing on the right of the road between Lamb's Corners and Grafton Square, this farm was owned (1833-1839) by James C. Jackson, abolition orator and editor. *Courtesy of Mrs. Willard Fetcha.*

sanction for slavery misinterpreted the Scriptures or that the Bible was not the word of God." They returned to church the next week to hear the preacher give a rousing defense of slavery and a hearty denunciation of their Sabbath breaking.

In rebuttal, they staged a meeting at the Prattsville school house, to which they invited as co-speakers Alfred Wells and a neighbor, Ransom Goss Williams. The crowd, too large for the school house, moved to the nearby Presbyterian Church. From two in the afternoon until seven at night, the four men standing alone at the front of the church debated the entire audience of five hundred people. Savage, Jackson, Wells, and Williams stood firm. As Elizabeth Simpson described it, they pushed their opponents " 'from Genesis to Revelation and crowded them back again,' insisting upon the New Testament teaching that there was 'neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free,' rather than the Mosaic law of the Old."[17]

Perhaps it was this debate that converted a large number of Mexico men to abolitionism, for in September, 1835, seventy-nine of them signed the petition described above.

"Bound by duty," the petition read. But what were these men bound by duty to do? First, they organized–at the state level, at

the local level, and at the county level. J.C. Jackson and a young man named Sweezey, son of a New Haven minister, attended the organizational meeting of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society at Utica and Peterboro in October, 1835. They returned home to begin work for abolition in Oswego County. Probably it was Jackson who organized the Mexico Anti-Slavery Society, and perhaps also the Oswego County Society, sometime during the next few months.[18]

Abolitionism quickly gained adherents in Mexico. In a letter dated July 18, an unidentified Mexico resident reported that

> Rev. Mr. Denison preached a sermon in our meeting house from these words, 'Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.' It was a most powerful and thrilling discourse, and for an hour and a half, held the audience in breathless silence. I hear, to-day, that some are converted to the cause by the strong argument he brought forward. After he had closed, Brother Grant [Tudor E. Grant, a barber] from Oswego, a colored Brother, addressed the assembly for some time with good effect. We hope to get three or four hundred signers to the petition to Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.[19]

The Mexico Society held a quarterly meeting on July 21, 1836. It was "well attended," reported the *Friend of Man*, the paper published by the New York State Anti-Slavery Society. Citizens from both Mexico and New Haven heard the Rev. Ralph Robinson, president of the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society, deliver "an excellent and convincing address, calculated to show the abominable character of slavery, and the kind of influence necessary to remove the sin." Mr. D. Kilburne from New Haven, "a man venerable for his years and his character," also spoke to the meeting. His topic was not only the abolition of slavery but the abolition of racial prejudice. Mr. Kilburne confessed

> that for sixty years he had indulged towards the colored man a cruel prejudice and dislike. He attributed the fact to the influence of slavery, in the midst of which he spent his childhood. 'But about two years since,' said he, 'a colored man called at my door, one Saturday evening, and requested permission to tarry in my house over the Sabbath. I gave him place, and before he left had occasion to bless God for this . . . refreshing interview with a christian brother. I found my dislike was wicked prejudice. Friends, I have none of it now.[20]

Mexico abolitionists undoubtedly were not content merely to hold

quarterly meetings and to give appropriate speeches. In all likelihood they took to heart the organizational techniques suggested in November, 1837 (and many times thereafter) by the Executive Committee of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society. This committee reminded town anti-slavery societies that "abolitionists have relied upon agents and lecturers to do the great work of the anti-slavery reformation, seeming to forget how much they, as individuals, can and must perform in their own towns, if they ever expect to see the slave enjoy his liberty." They suggested that each town organization appoint two agents, a man and a woman, for each school district in the town, and that these agents visit every family and every person over eighteen years of age, talking to him or her about abolitionism and selling a copy of the anti-slavery almanac. If they couldn't sell the almanac, they should give it away, for "these unpretending messengers of truth would be the means, if systematically distributed, of converting thousands of our countrymen to the first principles of our institutions, as well as the cause of humanity." In addition, the committee suggested that each agent circulate anti-slavery petitions, collect money for anti-slavery societies, solicit subscriptions to anti-slavery newspapers, and hold local monthly meetings. They also recommended that each school-district purchase a library of anti-slavery literature to be circulated among parents and children in the area.

The committee had high hopes for this system. Let it be implemented, they predicted, "and it would do more good, in the State of New York, than 100 lecturers. For the fact is, the people must be their own instructors, or the reformation will never be conducted to final success."[21]

Besides organizing at a local level, Mexico abolitionists participated in the meetings of the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society. Delegates to the annual county meeting in 1837 elected Starr Clark as secretary of the county society. He acted in that capacity until January, 1839, Asa Beebe, J.C. Jackson, and Orson Ames, all from Mexico, served on the executive committee of the county society in 1838 (Ames continued to serve through 1840), and Alfred Wells of Colosse served as vice-president, with Rev. John Eastman of Mexicoville.[22]

Mexico abolitionists sent another petition in the fall of 1837, when abolitionists all over the country responded in great numbers to the threat of Texas annexation. They feared that Texas, recently severed from the Republic of Mexico, would be annexed to the United States as a slave-holding state. The situation seemed desperate, as reflected in an editorial in the *Friend of Man* on June 28, 1837:

PETITIONS to CONGRESS remonstrating against the

annexation of TEXAS should be circulated for signatures WITHOUT DELAY! . . . in order to prevent *the annexation* of TEXAS–A MEXICAN WAR–*the gigantic growth of the* SLAVEHOLDING POWER–*the speedy* SUBJUGATION *of the* NORTH *to the SOUTH, and the ultimate rupture and* DISMEMBERMENT OF THE UNION, it will be necessary to pour in a flood of remonstrance–BY THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER!!![23]

Responding to the emergency, abolitionists in Mexico and in hundreds of other northern communities petitioned Congress "to reject all proposals for the annexation of TEXAS to the Union, from whatever source they may come." One hundred and forty men signed the Mexico petition, received in Congress on September 18, 1837.[24]

Mexico abolitionists sent another petition in 1845, signed by one hundred and eleven names. This one asked for "the enactment of laws abolishing slavery & prohibiting the slave trade in the said District of Columbia & also in the Territory of Florida."[25]

Mexico anti-slavery adherents not only organized and petitioned,

Starr Clark's store and tin shop on Main Street, Mexicoville. Built in 1827, it was occupied by him from 1832-1866 and served as an important station on the underground railway. Remodeled, it is now the bar across from the town hall. *Courtesy of Mrs. Willard Fetcha.*

they also aided escaping slaves. In March, 1837, for example, George Storrs, an abolitionist agent, conversed at length in Mexico with two escaped slaves, Virginians on their way to Canada. They had recently avoided recapture at Utica.

> They are both intelligent and interesting young men [Storrs reported]; one twenty, and the other twenty-one or three years old. The youngest can not read a letter, the other has learned to read a little. Those who saw them here, had their doubts entirely removed as to the fact whether slaves were men, or whether they could take care of themselves.[26]

In the fall of 1837, another fugitive slave, referred to only as George, arrived in Mexico. He had escaped from somewhere in the in the south via boat, only to be virtually re-enslaved by a supposed sympathizer in Pennsylvania, who made him work for several days without pay. George forcibly freed himself from this questionable hospitality and made his way north to Onondaga County. There he met an abolitionist who sent him to Hiram Gilbert in Schroeppel. Deacon Gilbert gave him a pair of boots and sent him on to Mexico. An unnamed abolitionist in Mexico (probably Starr Clark) told the story of his arrival there:

> I was looking out at my front door, and saw a colored man go to the tavern opposite. Some one asked if that was not one of *our* people. It is my practice whenever a colored man comes into our village to go and invite him to my house and make him free at the same table with my family, let him be bond or free; and my wife and children know no difference on account of color; they have not, as I can see, the least prejudice. I went over to the tavern, and saw the colored man sitting by the fire. After waiting till all had left the bar-room, I stepped carelessly towards him, and asked him if he was going to Oswego? No, was the answer. Which way are you traveling?—No answer. Do you know what an abolitionist is?—No answer. I took a chair and sat down close to him; told him that I did not wish to intrude upon him, but that I was an abolitionist and friendly towards the colored people. The only answer he gave was that there was a difference in abolitionists. I did not understand his meaning then. This was all I could get him to say, and I was about to give him up, when I observed to him that if he wanted any assistance, my store was directly opposite, and he could call over. For once he looked up and said, "Sir, what may I call your name." I told him my name was G. He stared me in the face and asked, "What is your other name?" I told him, and

> now came the change in his countenance. He thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew out two letters directed to me . . . The letters were from brethren in the south part of the county, recommending him to me as a fugitive and a Christian; and so we found him to be.[27]

Mexico abolitionists did what they could for George. He did not want to stay in Mexico, so they gave him some money, a guide, and several letters of introduction. On December 5, 1837, he went on his way to Canada.

Once escaped slaves reached Canada, abolitionists in Mexico continued to give them some support. In September, 1839, for example, they sent a box of supplies to Hiram Wilson, abolitionist agent in Canada, to be distributed among the fugitives.[28]

Mexico abolitionists also worked to promote equal rights for black people. In 1839, they worked to change the New York State law to make it possible for black people accused of being fugitive slaves to have a jury trial. And in 1840, Starr Clark and others worked to free James Seward, a black man from Schroeppel who had been captured and enslaved while visiting Louisiana.[29]

During 1838, as a result of the Texas scare, the murder of Elijah Lovejoy (an abolitionist in Illinois), and congressional refusal to receive petitions about slavery, abolitionism in Oswego County gained many new supporters. And these supporters became increasingly militant. At the suggestion of Tudor E. Grant, the county anti-slavery society passed a solemn resolution at its April meeting. "We ought to be ready to sacrifice everything," they resolved, "rather than in such an hour as this to shrink from duty. Life without liberty is little worth—and if we can not enjoy the privilege of speaking freely, and of writing freely, we ought, like Lovejoy, freely to die if necessary." At the June meeting, they appointed vigilance committees for each township in the county. Starr Clark, Joseph M. Barrows, and Orson Ames were appointed for Mexico.[30]

At Fulton in August, 1838, abolitionists from Oswego County held their largest meeting to date. In spite of bricks thrown against the building by "some of the baser sort," they managed to conduct business from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Among other actions, they ordered two thousand copies of anti-slavery tracts for local distribution. And they resolved staunchly that

> the vindication of the rights of the colored man in this country, has become so identified with the liberties of the nation, the government of law, the purity of religion, and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, that it is impossible to abandon the one without giving up the other—they must rise or fall together.[31]

Alvan Stewart, the main speaker at this county convention, spent the next Sunday in Mexicoville. At the invitation of Rev. Eastman, he lectured on temperance and abolition to the combined Presbyterian and Baptist congregations. At the end of the meeting, he circulated the constitution of the town anti-slavery society. To his "joy and surprise," one hundred new members joined the society. Stewart concluded that

> there is a body of highly cultivated and intelligent men and women in the county of Oswego, who labor day and night for the downtrodden bondmen of the Southern slave-holder, and for the northern bondmen of Old Alcohol. Nothing would delight these good men and women more than to see these two monsters—slavery and intemperance—yoked together, and thrown as far beyond the sun as it is from here to it.[32]

Abolitionism in Mexico continued to attract new converts. The publication of Theodroe Dwight Weld's *American Slavery As It Is* provided abolitionists in Mexico and elsewhere with a powerful publicity aid. Starr Clark reported in June, 1839, that he quickly sold or gave away the first fifty copies he received. In many cases, he noted, these pamphlets were "doing the balance of our work here. Many who were opposed to us, are beholding slavery as it is. Only yesterday, I heard of the conversion of an old professor of religion, who had been bitterly opposed to abolition."[33] By 1840, Mexico was indeed thoroughly abolitionized.

Though Mexico abolitionists remained committed to the cause, they began in 1838 to break away from the county and state anti-slavery organizations. The divisive issue was abolitionist political action. Should abolitionists carry their sentiments to the polls and vote only for candidates who were themselves anti-slavery men? And if so, should abolitionists form their own independent third party?

Up until 1838, abolitionists everywhere had emphasized what they called "moral suasion." They believed that their own moral influence would be enough to persuade their fellow Christians and countrymen—northerners and southerners alike—that slavery was wrong and should be abolished. As early as 1837, many abolitionists began to realize that moral suasion alone could not get rid of slavery. They began to use not only the power of exhortation but the power of the vote.

In an effort to influence political candidates while refraining from direct political action, delegates to the fall, 1837, meeting of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society endorsed a resolution to vote only for declared anti-slavery candidates. As a result of this action, the executive committee of the state society circulated a series of

questions to the various county societies, urging them to submit these questions to candidates for both branches of the state legislature and to publish the answers as they received them. The questions concerned candidate's views on petitions, Texas annexation, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the abolition of the internal slave trade, and votes, jury trials, and equality before the law for black people.[34]

Candidates in Oswego County approached the abolitionist questionnaire with caution and gave equivocal replies. Avery Skinner, for example, tavern keeper in Union Square and a candidate for the New York State Senate, declared himself "decidedly opposed to slavery in every form and place," but admitted himself "at a loss to know how it can be speedily abolished, without creating a greater evil." He supported the right of petition, opposed the annexation of Texas, and agreed that Congress should exercise all the power it possessed to abolish the inter-state and territorial slave trade.[35]

Questioning candidates for office whetted the appetite of some abolitionists for more political involvement. In the 1838 contest in the seventeenth congressional district (covering both Oswego and Oneida Counties), abolitionists took a further step toward full political participation. They not only questioned candidates, as they had done in 1837, but they also pledged themselves to vote only for avowed abolitionists. "We whose names are undersigned," they agreed,

> do hereby publicly pledge ourselves to vote for advocates of immediate emancipation if nominated in this congressional district, irrespective of parties; but should both parties refuse to nominate such men for Congress, then we will have nothing to do in voting for any part of the ticket of the party to which we respectively belong, (advocates of immediate emancipation excepted) but will remain at home, or give a scattering vote.[36]

The Oneida County Anti-Slavery Society adopted this pledge at its meeting on August 1, 1838. Two days later, at a convention in Fulton, the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society also adopted it. By the end of October, 342 voters from Oswego County and 846 from Oneida County had signed it.[37]

In the tense few weeks before the election, heated controversy developed over the acceptability of the two Whig candidates. One of them, Charles P. Kirkland, was a well-known anti-abolitionist. The other candidate was Henry Fitzhugh, brother-in-law of Gerrit Smith and prominent Oswego businessman. Fitzhugh, most informed sources conceded, was at least mildly in favor of abolitionism.

In the fall of 1838, abolitionists from the seventeenth district, acting on the advice of the Executive Committee of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, again questioned the candidates about their abolitionist views. In their joint response to these questions, Fitzhugh and Kirkland indicated that they favored the right of petition, objected to the further extension of United States territory (whether slave or free), and believed that slavery was "a moral, social, and political evil." They did not, however, commit themselves to any specific abolitionist action. On the contrary, they declared that "as to the particular measures which should be supported or opposed, we must from the nature of the representative office, be left to the honest exercise of an untrammeled judgment and discretion."[38]

Any confidence that friends of the slave may have felt in Fitzhugh was badly shaken by this joint announcement with Kirkland. Gerrit Smith denounced the action in a letter to the *Friend of Man* on November 7, 1838. Smith confessed that "even I, his brother-in-law, was much inclined to regard Henry Fitzhugh as an abolitionist—but, by the like touchstone, he is found wanting." Smith concluded that "of all the offensive answers I have read, his and Kirkland's joint answer is positively the most offensive."

Oswego County abolitionists, out of touch with the leadership in Oneida County, tried unsuccessfully to sort out an "almost incredible" number of rumors.[39] They assaulted the office of the *Friend of Man* with letters asking for information. *"We have no press,"* lamented one writer, "and are flooded with stories. Our men begin to waver."[40]

Searching for a clear path, Oswego County abolitionists took the first steps toward forming an abolitionist third party. Clinging to Fitzhugh, they rejected Kirkland and proposed Benjamin P. Johnson, a Democrat, for Congress in his stead.

The handbill which spread the news reached the *Friend of Man* in time for comment in its October 31 edition. *The Friend of Man* appreciated the "painful and embarassing situation" in which their friends in Oswego County had been placed. It characterized Benjamin Johnson as "a sound, though not an over active abolitionist." But it hesitated to endorse their plan. "It looks too much like organizing a new political party," concluded the paper.[41]

To James C. Jackson, the situation looked hopeful in spite of the confusion. He reported to Edwin W. Clarke in Oswego that

> 2000 men have listened to a speech from G. Smith, W.I. Chaplin, & H.B. Stanton on "Political Action." Oneida County will be saved so will Oswego from shipwreck. Tell our friends to give no quarter. Steward *[sic]* and Fitzhugh for Congress & Littlefield & a Constantia man must go for Legislature. Keep up true

> friends to the Sticking Point until I get back. We are determined to have Littlefield or nobody–none of your "second best men"–[42]

But misinformation and unreliable rumors left Oswego County abolitionists hesitant. Many of them defected to the Whig party. Just after the polls closed, the situation looked bleak indeed for those who had advocated a separate abolitionist ticket. James C. Jackson expressed his anguish in a letter to Gerrit Smith:

> The defection has been general, [he moaned]. Our first abolitionists have proven recreant . . . O! I am sick of such men. Lord God! deliver me from such miserable tools of party. My soul loathes them. I want to act with them no more. I cannot trust them in an emergency. They are the slaves of expediency.[43]

Among those whom Jackson so violently condemned was Starr Clark from Mexico.[44]

For the political abolitionists in Oswego County, the 1838 election had been a fiasco. Defeated and determined to prevent a re-play, they decided to try to mobilize the power of the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Association in support of political action. To do so, they proposed an amendment to the society's constitution. In the future, they argued, abolitionists should vote only for political candidates who were active members of anti-slavery societies.

Abolitionists in the county society were not yet ready for such a drastic step. For three meetings, they vigorously debated the new proposal. Not until March 21, 1839, three months after the initial suggestion, did they adopt a watered-down version of the original amendment. Abolitionists, the new clause read,

> will not give their suffrage at the general election for any man who does not give evidence of his regard for the principles of freedom; not only by unequivocal and satisfactory answers to questions, but by practical demonstrations that he will act efficiently in favor of immediate emancipation.[45]

Up until 1839, political abolitionists had developed no formal organization. But the adoption of this constitutional amendment in Oswego County (together with similar resoultions endorsed by the Oneida County Anti-Slavery Society and the New York State Anti-Slavery Society) led directly into the second phase of political abolitionism–the deliberate formation of an abolitionist third party.

Oswego County abolitionists did not hesitate to act upon the

implication of their decision. At a convention in New Haven on October 4, 1839, they nominated a separate third party ticket. Their candidates were Thomas Meacham of Sandy Creek, Lewis Falley of Fulton (both nominees for the state legislature), and Robert McFarland of Constantia (for coroner).[46]

The formation of this new party drove the final wedge between Mexico abolitionists and the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society. Starr Clark had already indicated his support for the Whigs (and therefore his opposition to third party abolitionists) in the crucial election of 1838. In 1839, most other Mexico anti-slavery people joined Clark in formidable opposition to the third party men in the rest of the county.

To begin with, they refused to attend the nominating convention at New Haven. D.S. Williams, then a student at the Rensselaer-Oswego Academy in Mexico, had tried "to provoke the good folks here to attend the meeting & point out what they deem your fatal awful error," but, he explained to E.W. Clarke of Oswego, "excuses now are as numerous & varied as in the days of the ancient feast, & it is doubtful whether you will have any delegation from this town."[47]

Williams had visited prominent Mexico anti-slavery men to ascertain their sentiments. Deacon Asa Beebe "was opposed to the whole movement [of political abolitionism] in toto." And, so far as Williams could learn, "such or similar is the feeling of every professed abolitionist around here, to a man." "Their reasons for this position are various," he concluded, "& however fallacious they may be, I cannot but think that they are honestly entertained." Deacon Beebe himself "has investigated this subject thoroughly, & is persuaded that the abolitionists of this state would ruin themselves by organizing into a distinct party, & that they can do much more to control the existing parties by remaining where they are." Of Starr Clark, Williams wrote, "his sentiments have undergone no changes [since he voted for the Whigs in 1838], & . . . he will exert a greater influence in the election than I had supposed." Orson Ames, still serving on the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society executive committee, was "an honest, whole-souled abolitionist, anxious to do what is best for the cause, but can't yet see that the course he pursued last fall is the best one." "All & sundry" in Mexico, concluded Williams, "are of the belief that more of good can be accomplished without than with the proposed organization." Of all the abolitionists in Mexico, only Almon Butterfield seemed amenable to the third party ticket.[48]

As the elections approached, some abolitionists took pains to prevent a re-enactment of the bitterness that had pervaded the 1838 election. D.S. Williams felt "pained at the prospect of division." Delegates to the nominating convention resolved "that whatever

House of Orson Ames, prominent abolitionist, on Main Street, Mexicoville. *Courtesy of Mrs. Willard Fetcha.*

difference of opinion there may be among the abolitionists on minor question in both politcs and religion, we agree in believing that the Almighty God has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth . . . "[49]

These good hopes for harmony were not to be realized. Starr Clark and other Mexico men not only refused to work with supporters of the new third party but actively tried to subvert their efforts by working hard for Whig candidates. Clark had been a member of the county Whig convention. He strongly supported William Duer, the Whig candidate for the New York Assembly. He had assured the convention that "Mr. Duer should have the vote of the Whig party in old Mexico to a man," and he meant to carry out his promise.[50]

A few days before the election, Clark, attempting to undercut abolitionist political strength, pulled a final coup. He circulated a handbill containing Duer's answers—carefully phrased so as to lure anti-slavery votes—to certain questions on abolitionism. Clark's action roused the enmity of other abolitionists in Oswego County. E.W. Clarke of Oswego, for example, characterized the maneuver as "prostitution of the name and influence of an abolitionist to subserve the interests of a slavery-loving party."[51]

What ever the ethics of Clark's campaign tactics (Clark himself obviously believed they were acceptable), they worked in Mexico.

Thomas Meachum and Lewis Falley, abolitionist candidates for the State Assembly, received only twelve votes in Mexico. William Duer and his Whig running mate received 364 and 355, respectively, over 150 more than their Democratic counterparts.[52]

In 1840, a presidental election year, the third party movement became nation-wide. At Syracuse on August 5, the new Liberty Party nominated James G. Birney for president of the United States and Thomas Earle for vice president. The Oswego County anti-slavery society endorsed these Liberty Party candidates at its meeting in Fulton on August 25, 1840. No abolitionist from Mexico attended.[53]

In 1840, Starr Clark worked harder than ever for the Whigs. He himself ran for county treasurer on the Whig ticket, and he supported William Duer for Assemblyman and William Henry Harrison for president of the United States.

Clark reported with pride in July, 1840, that Mexico had 485 true Whigs and only 145 Van Buren men. "Let every man vote and all will be safe," he assured Thurlow Weed, a prominent Whig politican. By August, Clark gloated that

> We are making daily additions & loosing *[sic]* none. Not a single strait *[sic]* Whig has left us to my knowledge in the county.
>
> This Town alone offers to ship out Oneida County. When the votes of this Town are canvassed, the results will astonish the nation—friend and foe . . . Oswego County is safe.

He predicted that Mexico alone would give a two hundred vote majority for Harrison.[54]

Many Liberty Party men in Oswego County were disheartened by the threatened wholesale defection of abolitionists in Mexico. In their disappointment, they hinted that some Mexico anti-slavery men were more concerned with their own personal profit than with the future of the slave. Asa Wing, a student at the Rensselaer-Oswego Academy, reported, for example, that "there are but fiew*[sic]* in this town that will be true at the polls, party zeal will warp most of the professed abolitionists here into their old political shackles. But blessed be God ther *[sic]* are some who regard the slave more than party or offices of profit." Wing pointed out that many people in Mexico were indeed still sincerely committed to moral suasion. But, he argued,

> what is the truth in this matter, who exerts the greatest moral influence, the man who preaches against slavery, and signs petitions to congress for its abolishment and then votes for the slave-holders and pro-slavery men, or that man who preaches

> and prays against slavery, and then votes for men who will 'rule in the fear of God.' Let us then my brother convince those who are so fraid *[sic]* of leaving moral suasion, that they kill the power of moral suasion by their inconsistent voting.[55]

No one was surprised by the results of the election in Mexico. Only fourteen men voted for the Liberty Party ticket. Most Mexico abolitionists cast their votes for Harrison, who won the election. Duer became the next Assemblyman. And Starr Clark won the position for county treasurer.[56]

In 1841, the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society, in a non-conciliatory mood, re-emphasized its differences with the abolitionists in Mexico. At its January meeting in the court house in the village of Oswego, the society made clear its support of political action. They resolved

> that the distinction between moral and political action, in abolishing slavery or any other human law which conflicts with God's law, is but another name for the distinction between faith and works; and as the good work of voting against slavery, not being done from a Christian abhorrence of it, is no more acceptable to God than other good works that men may do from improper motives, so moral suasion, when directed against a slavery statute, without the corresponding vote, is dead, being alone.[57]

So much for moral suasion. So much for Mexico abolitionists!

By the summer of 1841, the county anti-slavery society had itself become a convention of the Liberty Party. No delegates from Mexico attended the August meeting of the new political organization, although Asa Wing, a Mexico resident, appeared as a representative from the township of Palermo.[58] In the November elections, Liberty Party candidates for county offices received only four votes from Mexico township.[59] The isolation of Mexico abolitionists from their former allies in the rest of the county had become complete.

Who were the men who so diligently promoted the cause of abolition in Mexico? From the number of names attached to Mexico's petitions, it might seem that almost everybody in the township was an abolitionist. In fact, only about 14% of the voters signed the 1835 petition; about 20% signed the 1837 petition; and about 14% signed the 1845 petition. If we analyze these names closely, we can discern that forty-one men signed more than one

petition. Nine of these men–Orson Ames, J.M. Barrows, Asa Beebe, John Bennett, Starr Clark, Benjamin Gregory, Jr., Edwin Huntington, John Turk, and John Wickware–signed all three petitions. Let us look at each of these nine men individually and then at certain characteristics of the group as a whole.[60]

Starr Clark was born in Lee, Massachusetts, in 1793, moved to Oneida County in 1816, and came to Mexicoville from Utica in 1832. He soon set himself up as a stove dealer and tinware manufacturer, with a store on Main Street and a home just east of it. Almost immediately, he and his wife, Harriet, began going to the new Mexicoville Presbyterian Church, and on April 26, 1833, they joined the church by letter. Sometime during 1834 or 1835, Clark became an abolitionist. Beginning in the fall of 1835, he took an extraordinarily active part in anti-slavery activities in Mexico and throughout the county. Much of this work we have already discussed. During the 1840's he was dismissed from the Presbyterian Church because he advocated the doctrine of Christian Union, i.e., he believed that sectarianism was wrong and that all Christians should join together in one church. He then joined the Methodists who apparently did not find his views so controversial. His two daughters became milliners and opened a small shop in the village. By 1855, he had established himself as a man of moderate means, with a frame house worth $2300 and a tin business worth $900. He died in 1866 and was remembered shortly afterwards as "an active and influential citizen."

"A decided and zealous abolitionist," Orson Ames was also "a man of much influence" in Mexico township. Born in Connecticut in 1799, he moved to Mexico with his parents (Leonard and Minerva Ames) shortly after 1800. By 1826, he was a tanner and shoemaker with an establishment on Black Creek north of Main Street. He also ran a sawmill in the 1820's. In 1833 he expanded his interests and bought a trip-hammer factory, also on Black Creek, where he made scythes and axes. He was not a church-going man, but he did support education and became one of the first trustees of the new Rensselaer-Oswego Academy. By 1855, he had acquired a farm worth $7225, a tannery worth $2250, and a house worth $2000. He was, perhaps, the most wealthy man in this group.

Asa Beebe, foundry man and moulder, was born in Vermont in 1792 or 1793, came to Mexico about 1807, and fought in the war of 1812 at the battle of Sackets Harbor. He became very active in the Presbyterian Church, and served as deacon for several years. In the 1840's, he, along with Starr Clark, was dismissed from the church for his ideas of Christian Union. Characterized as a "stern, inflexible man, very tenacious of his opinions," he supported Starr Clark in refusing to work for the Liberty Party. By 1855, he, too, had reached

a level of material comfort, with a house worth $1500, a farm worth $2625, and a furnace and machine shop worth $3000.

Benjamin Gregory, Jr., was born about 1800 in Saratoga County, New York, and came to Mexico about 1825. A tanner and currier, he joined the Presbyterian Church in 1834. By 1855, he lived in a frame house worth $800. His tannery, which he owned in partnership, was valued at $2500.

Edwin Huntington was born in Otsego County on June 1, 1805, of parents who had emigrated from Connecticut. He came to Mexico as a young man in 1829 and established himself as a millwright. One of his sons, Lewis, died in the Civil War. Another son, Edwin, Jr., started a drugstore in Mexico and became sheriff of the county in 1882. By 1855, Edwin, Sr., had a frame house worth $800 and two acres of land.

John Turk, a navigator of boats and later a farmer, was born in Montgomery County about 1809. By 1855, he had a block house worth $300 and a farm worth $1100.

John Wickware, a farmer, was born in 1781 and fought in Leander Parkhurst's battalion in the War of 1812. He seems to have been one of the poorest of this group as well as the oldest, for by 1850 he had accumulated only $300 worth of property.

John Bennet came to Mexico in 1824, at about age twenty. He was a farmer, but seems also to have worked at some trade. By 1850, he had a house and farm of moderate size.

Joseph M. Barrows, a farmer and later a merchant, was born in Connecticut in 1806. By 1850, he had property worth $5000. All of the last three men apparently died or left Mexico sometime after 1850, for none of them appears on the 1855 census.

We know that some of these men held leadership positions in abolitionist organizations. Most of them probably did not, and for them, nothing remains but the petitions to indicate their sincere, long-term commitment to anti-slavery.

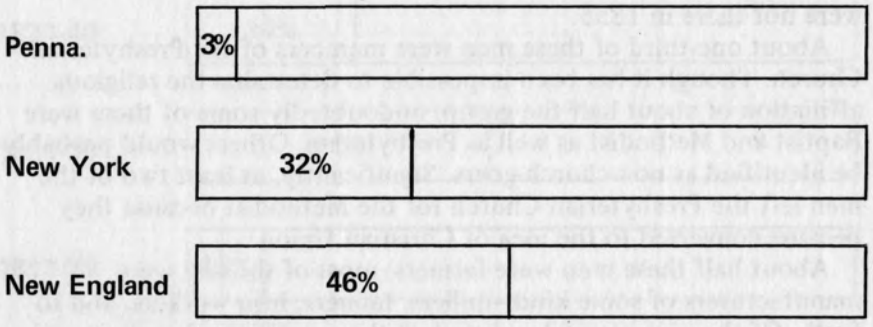
If we group these men with the thirty-two others who signed at least two anti-slavery petitions, we can tabulate for this larger group their places of birth, ages, dates of arrival in Mexico, when they left Mexico, their occupations, religion, and the amount of property they owned in 1855. The resulting sketch can be termed a *collective biography* of these men.

Most of these men, almost half, were born in New England. Most of the others, over one-third, were born somewhere in New York State.[61]

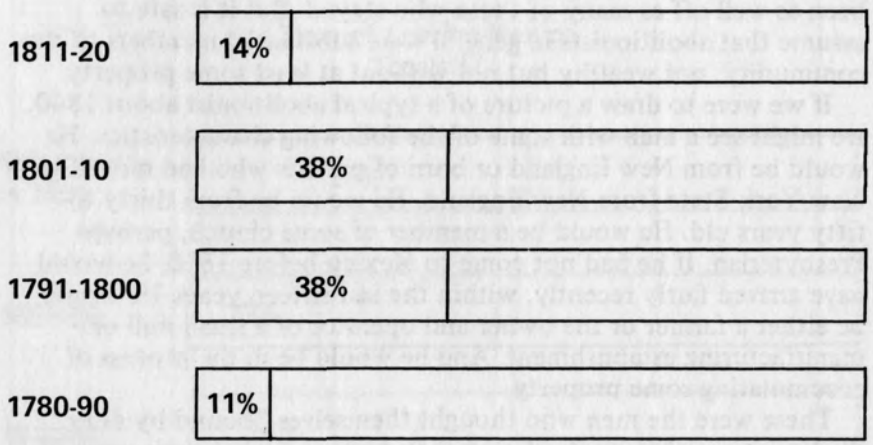
Most of the men were born between 1790 and 1810. In 1840, they were thirty to fifty years old. Most of them came to Mexico between 1820 and 1835, during the period when Mexico experienced its greatest population growth. A substantial number, however,

ABOLITIONISTS IN MEXICO

Place of Birth
Total=30



Date of Birth
Total=37



*Total percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding off.

came to Mexico as pioneers just after the turn of the century; a few were born in Mexico, like Ranslo Alfred. About half of the total number were still in Mexico by 1855. Some of the rest had died; others, like William Goit, moved. Almost one-fifth of those who left the town did so between 1850 and 1855. Of the nine men who signed all three petitions, only two—Joseph Barrows and John Wickware—were not there in 1855.

About one-third of these men were members of the Presbyterian Church. Though it has been impossible to determine the religious affiliation of about half the group, undoubtedly some of them were Baptist and Methodist as well as Presbyterian. Others would probably be identified as non-church-goers. Significantly, at least two of the men left the Presbyterian Church for the Methodist because they became converted to the idea of Christian Union.

About half these men were farmers; most of the rest were manufacturers of some kind—millers, tanners, iron workers, and so forth. Of the nine men who signed all three petitions, however, only two of them, Joseph M. Barrows and John Wickware, were primarily farmers. Many of the others, however, carried on some farming in addition to their other work.

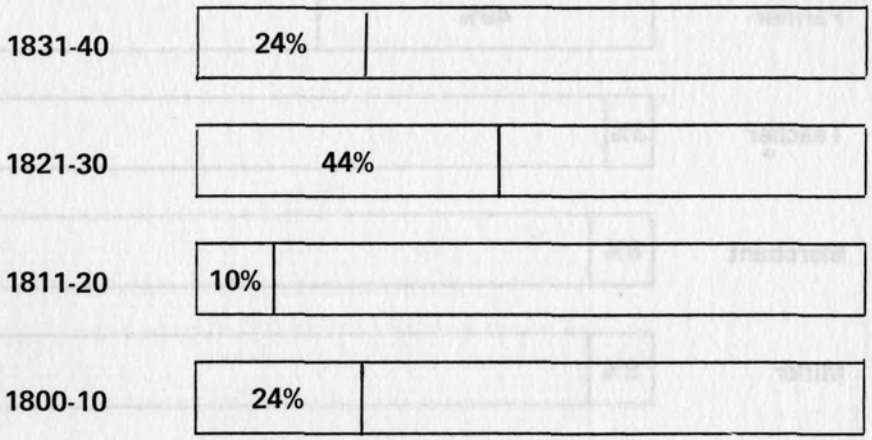
By 1855, most of these men had accumulated a moderate amount of property, though few of them could be called rich. Of the eighteen men remaining in Mexico by that date, half of them lived in homes worth between $500 and $1500. Over half of them, too, had business property worth between $1000 and $6000. Those abolitionists who had died or left Mexico before 1855 may not have been as well off as many of those who stayed. But it is safe to assume that abolitionists in general were substantial members of the community, not wealthy but not without at least some property.

If we were to draw a picture of a typical abolitionist about 1840, we might see a man with some of the following characteristics: He would be from New England or born of parents who had moved to New York State from New England. He would be from thirty to fifty years old. He would be a member of some church, perhaps Presbyterian. If he had not come to Mexico before 1810, he would have arrived fairly recently, within the last fifteen years. He would be either a farmer or the owner and operator of a small mill or manufacturing establishment. And he would be in the process of accumulating some property.

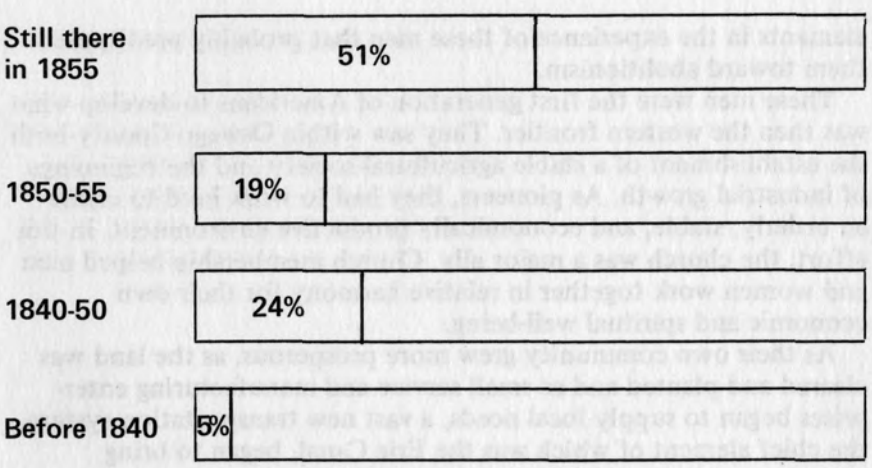
These were the men who thought themselves "bound by duty." We have seen what kinds of men they were and what their sense of duty led them to do. But a further, perhaps a more intriguing question, still remains. *Why* were they bound by this sense of duty? What motivated them to plead so ardently for the cause of the slave? The answer is not clear. There were, however, certain common

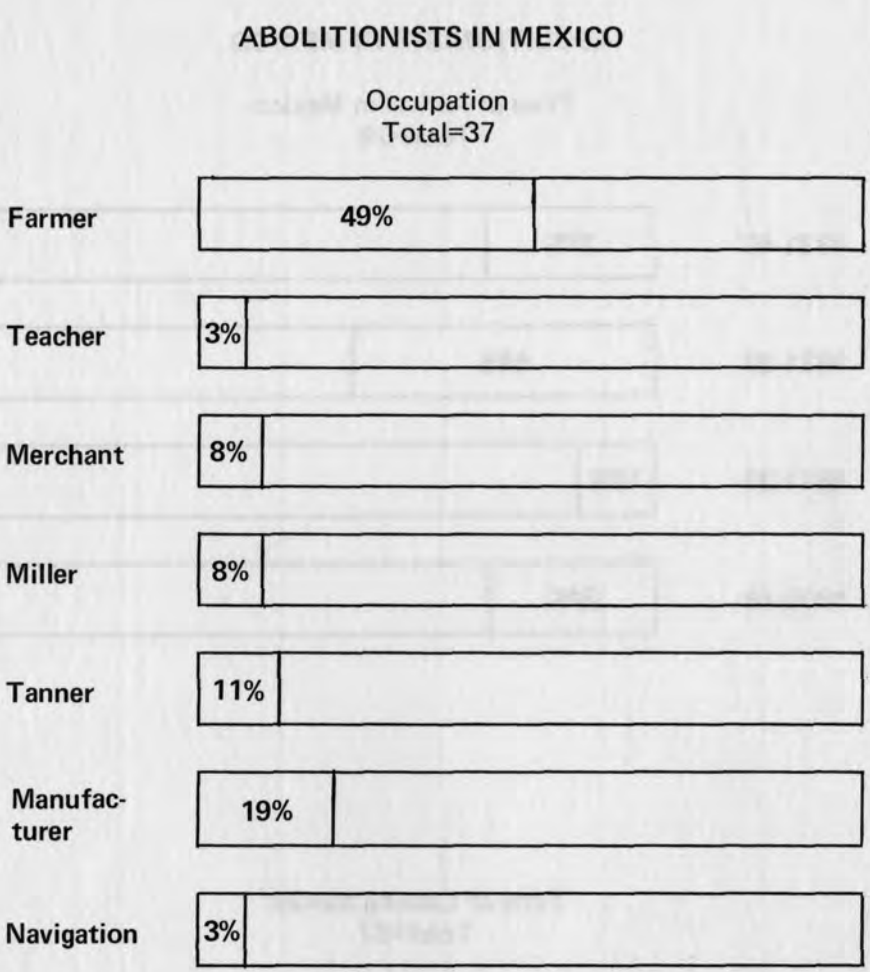
ABOLITIONISTS IN MEXICO

Time of Arrival in Mexico
Total=29



Time of Leaving Mexico
Total=37





elements in the experience of these men that probably predisposed them toward abolitionism.

These men were the first generation of Americans to develop what was then the western frontier. They saw within Oswego County both the establishment of a stable agricultural society and the beginnings of industrial growth. As pioneers, they had to work hard to create an orderly, stable, and economically productive environment. In this effort, the church was a major ally. Church membership helped men and women work together in relative harmony for their own economic and spiritual well-being.

As their own community grew more prosperous, as the land was cleared and planted and as small service and manufacturing enterprises began to supply local needs, a vast new transportation system, the chief element of which was the Erie Canal, began to bring

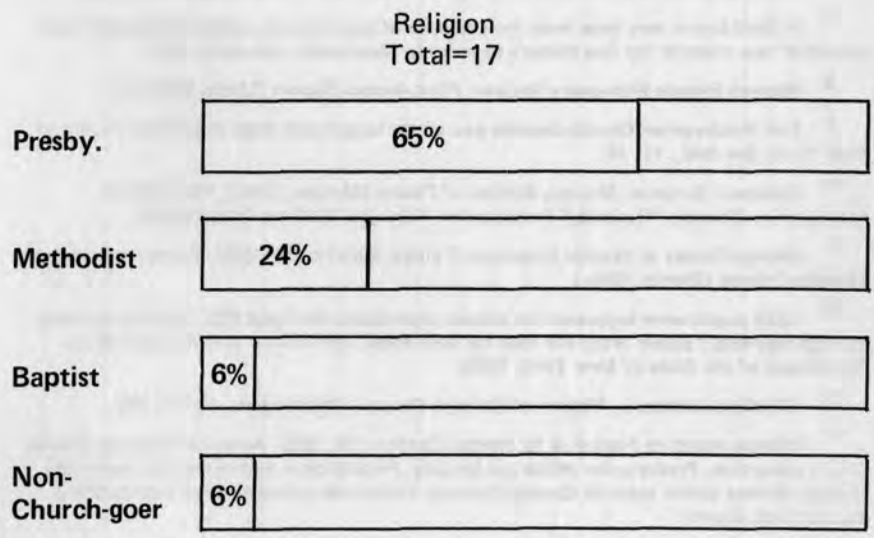
increased contacts with the world outside their own locale. Aware now of national events and a national economic system, Mexico people began to enlarge their concept of community. They began to think of themselves as residents not only of their own locality but of the entire new American nation. No longer did one's neighbor live only next door, or even down the street. As Americans, these men defined their community as their country; their neighbors were their fellow countrymen—east and west, north, and most importantly, south.

Mexico men had used the power of religion in their local communities to strengthen themselves for the task of earning a living and to control anti-social behavior. They had succeeded very well. As their vision of community broadened, they tried to impose this religio-economic model on the rest of the country. They tried to apply on a national scale the Christian values of charity, empathy, and love for one's neighbor.

At first glance, the ideals of the new nation seemed very much in harmony with these Christian beliefs. After all, most Americans subscribed to the principles in the Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration asserted unequivocally that "all men are created equal."

Yet, by the 1830's, it became very obvious that there was at least one major discrepancy between the American ideal and the reality. That discrepancy was slavery. In no way could abolitionists

ABOLITIONISTS IN MEXICO



reconcile slavery with their beliefs as Christians and as Americans. They were, therefore, "bound by their duty to their Country, to their fellow men, and to their God," to work for the equality and brotherhood of all men–black or white.

NOTES

1 "Petition of Sundry Inhabitants of the Town of Mexico, in the County of Oswego & State of New York, praying for the abolition of Slavery in the D. of Columbia, "received February 29, 1836, and referred to the Select Committee, House of Representatives, HR24A-G22.4, National Archives Building.

2 D.S. Williams in his letter to E.W. Clarke, September 22, 1839, called Beebe stern and inflexible. In E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society, New York City. The 79 voters who signed the abolitionist petition formed 13.6% of the 580 voters listed in Mexico township by the state census in 1835. See "County of Oswego,"*New York State Census,* 1835 (Albany, 1836).

3 "County of Oswego," *Census of the State of New York,* 1835.

4 2671 people lived in Mexico township in 1830; 3729 lived there in 1840. See United States Census reports for 1830 and 1840.

5 "County of Oswego," *Census of the State of New York,* 1835 and 1845.

6 Thomas Gordon, *Gazeteer of the State of New York* (Philadelphia, 1836), 615.

7 A third factor may have been the presence of bog iron ore, which provided a local source of raw material for Asa Beebe's foundry in Mexicoville. See *Ibid.,* 615.

8 Western Female Missionary Society, *First Annual Report* (Utica, 1817), 6.

9 This Presbyterian Church became one of the largest and most influential in central New York. See *Ibid.,* 11, 14.

10 Elizabeth Simpson, *Mexico, Mother of Towns* (Mexico, 1949), 482, 492-3; Presbyterian Church, "Records," Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

11 George Finney to Charles Grandison Finney, October 30, 1831. Finney manuscripts, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

12 1228 pupils were registered for school; attendance averaged 730. The county-wide average was 486.7 pupils listed the rolls for each town, with 311.4 in daily attendance. See *Census of the State of New York,* 1845.

13 [Crisfield Johnson], *History of Oswego County* (Philadelphia, 1877), 268.

14 William Hatch to Frederick W. Porter, October 15, 1831. American Sunday School Union collection, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Hatch was the American Sunday School Union agent in Oswego County. Porter was corresponding secretary for the national society.

15 Elizabeth Simpson, "Two Famous Abolitionists of Oswego County," *Fourth Publication of the Oswego Historical Society,* XII (1940), 81-91. Simpson did not footnote this story. I assume that much of it was based on oral sources. The initial meeting seems to have taken place several months prior to October, 1835, although Simpson gives no specific date.

16 *Ibid.,* 84.

17 *Ibid.,* 84. Of these four men—Algernon Savage, Alfred Wells, James C. Jackson, and R.G. Williams—Savage and Wells died shortly thereafter. J.C. Jackson and R.G. Williams continued to be active abolitionists, but not on the local level. Jackson became an Oswego county abolitionist agent. In 1838, he began to work for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society as the "farm boy speaker." In 1839, he became secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He resigned in 1840 to become editor of the *Madison County Abolitionist,* which soon changed its name to the *Liberty Press.* After a debilitating illness in 1846, he opened a water cure establishment called "Glen Haven," at the head of Skaneateles Lake. He received a medical degree from Syracuse University. After Glen Haven burned, he moved to Dansville, New York, and set up the Jackson Sanitorium. He died there in 1895. R.G. Williams became publishing agent for the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, working first in New York City and then in Utica.

18 *Ibid.,* 85.

19 *Friend of Man,* August 4, 1836.

20 *Friend of Man,* August 18, 1836. By September of that year the village of Oswego also formed an anti-slavery society, after a series of lectures by G.R. Parburt, an abolitionist agent. In October, Palermo abolitionists also organized. These three organizations were quite likely the first formally established anti-slavery societies in the county. See *Friend of Man,* September 8, 1836 and November 3, 1836.

21 *Ibid.,* August 22, 1838. This basic system was reaffirmed by the Oswego County Anti-Slavery Society at its August 1838, meeting.

22 *Ibid.,* February 8, 1837; February 6, 1838.

23 *Friend of Man,* June 28, 1837.

24 Petition against the annexation of Texas, presented to the House of Representatives September 18, 1837, and laid on the table. HR25A-H1.1, National Archives Building.

25 "Petition of O.H. Whitney, Starr Clark, Levi Downing & one hundred & eleven other citizens of the Town of Mexico, Oswego Co., N.Y., praying for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia & in the Territory of Florida," referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia, House of Representatives. HR 28A-G5.1, National Archives Building.

J. Brown (probably James Brown) from Oswego wrote to Gerrit Smith that he was acting as a "Central Committee for this County in getting signatures." He had sent sixty circulars to anti-slavery men in various townships in Oswego County and asked them to collect signatures to be combined in one Oswego County Roll. There is no indication as to whether the Mexico petition was sent in response to this circular, or independently. See Brown to Gerrit Smith, December 15, 1845. Gerrit Smith collection, George Arendts Research Library, Syracuse University.

26 *Friend of Man,* March 29, 1837.

27 *Ibid.,* February 28, 1838.

28 *Ibid.,* January 15, 1840. Letter from Hiram Wilson, abolitionists agent in Canada, to William C. Goodell, editor of the *Friend of Man.*

29 Starr Clark to Governor William H. Seward, April 15, 1840. William H. Seward collection, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

30 *Friend of Man,* May 16, 1838, and July 4, 1838.

31 *Ibid.*, August 22, 1838.

32 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1838.

33 *Ibid.*, June 26, 1839.

34 *Ibid.*, October 4, 1837.

35 *Ibid.*, November 8, 1837.

36 *Ibid.*, August 8, 1838.

37 *Ibid.*, October 31, 1838.

38 *Ibid.*, October 31, 1838.

39 *Ibid.*, October 31, 1838.

40 *Ibid.*, November 29, 1838.

41 *Ibid.*, October 31, 1838.

42 Jackson to E.W. Clarke, [November, 1838], E.W. Clarke papers, Oswego County Historical Society.

43 November, 1838. Gerrit Smith collection, George Arendts Research Library, Syracuse University. Among those listed as recreants were S.B. Ludlow, John B. Edwards, Starr Clark, Ard H. Stevens, Norman Rowe, Lucas Van Schaack, and "a host of others."

44 In spite of abolitionist efforts for the Whigs, the Democrats carried Oswego County by 100 votes. See *Oswego County Whig,* November 21, 1838.

45 *Friend of Man,* March, 1839. The amendment was originally proposed on January 17, 1839.

46 *Ibid.*, March 4, 1840; October 16, 1839. See also Thomas Meacham to Edwin W. Clarke, September 16, 1839; Meacham to Clarke, October 22, 1839; Clarke to Meacham, October 26, 1839. E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society.

47 D.S. Williams to E.W. Clarke, September 22, 1839. E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society.

48 Edwin W. Clarke to Almon Butterfield, October 24, 1839. E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society.

49 *Friend of Man,* October 16, 1839.

50 See exchange of letters between Starr Clark and E.W. Clarke, listed below.

51 Starr Clark responded in a private letter to Edwin W. Clarke, accusing him of misrepresenting the truth. E.W. Clarke thanked him for his "compliments" and said he knew of nothing he had said that was untrue and that he intended to defend himself if publicly attacked. Again in May, E.W. Clarke wrote to Starr Clark, asking him to put specific charges of falsehood in writing. Apparently, the matter rested there. Starr Clark to E.W. Clarke, April 1, 1840; E.W. Clarke to Starr Clark, April 6, 1840; E.W. Clarke to Starr Clark, May 13, 1840. E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society.

52 *Oswego County Whig,* November 19, 1839.

53 *Friend of Man,* October 28, 1840.

54 Starr Clark to Thurlow Weed, July 8, 1840, and August 15, 1840. Thurlow Weed collection, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

55 Asa Wing to E.W. Clarke, October 29, 1840. E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society.

56 Asa Wing to E.W. Clarke, n.d. (postmarked November 15, 1840). E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society; John C. Churchill, *Landmarks of Oswego County* (Syracuse, 1895), 225-6.

57 *Friend of Man,* February 23, 1841.

58 *Ibid.,* August 31, 1841.

59 *Ibid.,* January 11, 1842.

60 Information about these men came from the 1830, 1840 and 1850 federal censes; the 1855 census of the State of New York; Elizabeth Simpson, *Mexico, Mother of Towns;* [Crisfield Johnson], *History of Oswego County;* John C. Churchill, *Landmarks of Oswego County;* records of the Presbyterian Church in Mexico, now at the Presbyterian Historical Society; letters in the E.W. Clarke collection, New York Historical Society; and letters in the Gerrit Smith collection, George Arendts Research Library, Syracuse University.

61 Quite likely, the parents of those born in New York State had recently emigrated from New England. We can safely assume that most abolitionists—and most residents—of Mexico township were transplanted Yankees.

Bibliographical note:

Three articles on abolitionism in Oswego County have appeared previously in the *Yearbook* of the Oswego County Historical Society—

Frieda Scheulke, "Activities of the Underground Railroad in Oswego County," XII (1940), 1-14.

Elizabeth Simpson, "Two Famous Abolitionists of Oswego County," XII (1940), 81-91.

Charles M. Snyder, "The Antislavery Movement in the Oswego Area," XVIII (1955), 2-12.

My thanks to Mrs. Willard Fetcha, town historian for Mexico, who lent the photographs used in this essay. Photos were taken by Jack Exley and included in an undated term paper entitled "The Underground Railway in Mexico and Vicinity, 1830-60," by Jack Exley and Eleanor J. Mansfield.

Appendix

ABOLITIONIST LEADERS IN MEXICO, N.Y. 1835-45

I. The following men singed all three anti-slavery petitions sent to Congress from Mexico, 1835-45:

Orson Ames
Joseph M. Barrows
Asa Beebe
John Bennett
Starr Clark
Benjamin Gregory, Jr.
Edwin Huntington
John Turk
John Wickware

II. The following men signed two the three petitions:

Ranslo S. Alfred
Harry Ames
Zenus Butterfield
Stephen Calkins
James S. Chandler
Hurlow Curtis
Jonathan Densmoe (Densmer)
John W. Dukin (Deeker)
Samuel Emery
William Goit
Anson Gustin
George G. Hapgood
Isaac Johnson
Lyman B. Lord
E.C. Mitchell
Levi Mitchell
Gad Morton, Jr.
Oliver Ormsley
Solomon Peck, Jr.
Anson Savage
Joel Savage
Amasa Shumway
Eldad Smith
Mark Smith
Reuben Smith,
Samuel H. Stone
David P. Taylor
David Walter
Artemus Wheeler
Samuel M. Wilson
Joseph Wing
Jabin Wood

Some Glass Bottles of Oswego County and Their Contents

*Leigh A. Simpson**

Glass in its many forms has long held the interest of those who prize objects of rare beauty and delicacy. In recent years the collecting of such utilitarian glass objects as bottles has greatly influenced the lives of many Americans. In 1900 Edwin A. Barber authored *American Glass Ware* which was concerned essentially with historical sketches of the old glass works and bottles that are today known as "historical flasks." This now out-of-print volume was one of the earliest to devote itself to this aspect of the hobby.[1]

In 1926 Stephen Van Rensselaer wrote *Early American Bottles & Flasks* which expanded greatly on Barber's earlier work. For many years it has been out of print, but John Edwards recently published a new version in 1971. Since Van Rensselaer began to collect American bottles in the 1920's, bottle collecting as a hobby has grown to encompass over ten million enthusiasts, according to the estimates. With such a large following I felt it imperative to re-issue Van Rensselaer's famous reference work.[2]

In 1941 George McKearin and his daughter Helen, after what must have been an old-fashioned Herculean effort, produced the great and well-known *American Glass.* This book, with over 600 pages devoted to the study of glass in a multitude of forms, did much to further classify the collection of early flasks.[3]

I, originally, started my collection of glass bottles with a free-blown chestnut-type, early flask—so-called because of its shape. However, I soon found that my interests were extremely eclectic and now I have representatives of several classes of bottles. With the horde of fellow collectors previously alluded to, it is easy to see

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*Dr. Simpson, a dentist by profession, has been a bottle enthusiast for twelve years. As a member of the Empire State Bottle Collector's Association, he is recognized as an authority on Oswego County bottles and glass.

that the law of supply and demand has a great effect on the price of the rarer flasks and bottles. This is, then, another quite obvious reason why there has developed a great following for other types of bottles.

Cecil Munsey in his *Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles* has provided the modern bottle buff with a fine tool to use in surveying the whole spectrum. I have excerpted the following classifications which have some reference to Oswego County: wine bottles; patent and proprietary medicine bottles; historical and pictorial flasks; figural bottles; mineral and soda water bottles; bitters bottlers; beer bottles; ink bottles; whiskey bottles; pottery bottles; pottery jugs; fruit jars; food bottles; perfume, scent and cologne bottles; poison bottles; decanters and bar bottles; barber bottles; drugstore bottles; nursing bottles; candy bottles; and milk bottles. It is not my intention to relate this entire list to our county. I included it to show the opportunities to join in the fun of "the chase."

Space and time limitations do not permit me to explore in detail all that I would like to do. I shall probably leave out a reference to somebody's favorite item or area. For this I am sorry and I welcome personal communication at any time for I have much to learn about the people and bottles of my county.

I thought it appropriate to at least share the background of those bottles from Oswego County which have "made it" in the "big league:" patent and proprietary medicine bottles and bitters bottles.

Patent medicines originated in England where the first patent of record was dated 1712. By the 1750's patent medicine were being shipped to America. Not all medicines were patented–actually very few were. The U.S. Patent Office opened in 1790 and the first patent for medicines was not issued until 1796. Since the maker would have to disclose the ingredients–a good percentage of which was alcohol–registration of the brand name was a better protection than a patent. Therefore, in the strict use of the word, all ready-made medicines cannot be called "patent medicines." Those whose brand names were registered are more properly called proprietary medicines. The term patent medicine has, however, become the generic one for all medicines sold without prescription.

Bitters seem to have originated in seventeenth century Germany from where they spread to Italy and England. In England during the reign of George II (1722-1760) it was decided that the English people were drinking too much gin. In an effort to control this excessive drinking and to raise revenue at the same time, a tax was levied on the gin and the number of pubs was restricted. In order to stay in business the gin sellers added various herbs to their product and sold it as medicinal liquor. They called their product bitters,

coltick water and gripe water, but it was the term bitters that stuck.

In the post-Revolutionary period in America, taxes on gin, rum, and bitters were abandoned, most of the revenues coming from customs duties and property taxes. It was not until the beginning of the Civil War that the government initiated such taxes. The Revenue Act of 1862 taxed many things including proprietary medicines (bitters came under this classification) and liquor. Since the tax on liquor was substantially more than the one on medicine, taxation became once again a major consideration of the consumer of alcohol. The popularity of bitters climbed rapidly during this period and probably explains why the vast majority of collectible bitters bottles were produced between 1860 and 1900.

An analysis of several of the well-known bitters products in the late 1800's revealed alcoholic content of from 59.14% to 6.36%, or 118.28 to 12.72 proof.

While a great many Americans did drink bitters as a liquor, many more believed that they were drinking medicine. Bitters producers emphasized the supposed value of their products and claimed miraculous cures for a multitude of afflictions as seen in newspaper ads, trade cards, and almanacs. Many manufacturers assumed the title of "doctor" to glamorize their products and most used testimonials from distinguished citizens from all walks of life.

A Collector's Guide to Patent and Proprietary Medicine Bottles of the Nineteenth Century by Joseph K. Baldwin lists "Watson's Cancer & Scrofula Syrup (Dr. J.)." He indicates: "Although many medicines claimed to have been effective on cancer, it is most unusual to see the word embossed on a bottle."[5] Also embossed on this aqua bottle is "Fulton, N.Y."

Dr. J. Watson, the promoter of this product, was a druggist whose store was in the "dizzy block" on the east side of South First Street. The store was in operation from the 1870's until the early 1900's. At one time, Watson lived in the house of known as "Judge Wilson's house" on the west corner of Park and Academy Streets across from the park. I have one of these bottles and several other types of Watson bottles in my collection, as well as several nationally known bitters almanacs which were issued under the auspices of this drug store.

In Richard Watson's *Bitters Bottles* is listed "Poor Man's Family Bitters," originally made by the Poor Man's Bitters Company in Oswego.[6]

I am very much indebted to my good friend, Donald Burnside, recently retired proprietor of Burnside Pharmacy, 209 West First Street, Oswego, for much help in learning about this preparation. He was the last person to produce this bitters in the 1930's. The sequence was as follows: Poor Man's Family Bitters Company,

Mead's Drug Store, Bush Pharmacy, Burnside Pharmacy.

On a visit to the Burnside Pharmacy a few years ago my collector's anxiety was truly aroused. He showed me an old metal mould which had been used to manufacture the one-half pint bitters bottles. I immediately told him that if the day ever came he wished to part with it he knew the party to contact. There were various reasons he wished to keep it at that time and the issue lay dormant for a long period, at least it seemed that way to me. Finally, I received the word I had hoped to hear and the "deal" was consummated–an old story to fellow collectors of anything!

Apparently when the old method of fabricating these bottles was discontinued this mould was returned to Oswego from Binghamton where the Binghamton Glass Works had done the manufacturing. To the best of my knowledge no bottles were ever commercially made here in Oswego County at either the Cleveland or Bernhards Bay glass enterprises.

An examination of the labels for Poor Man's from the 1870's to the 1930's will provide a fine glimpse of the medical mores during that period. My earliest label makes no mention of alcoholic content. Later, we read "contains about 12% alcohol." The last label reads, "alcohol 12%." On the front of both early labels appears:

> These bitters are superior to any other medicine with which we are acquainted in the treatment of dyspepsia, liver complaint, jaundice, loss of appetite, debility, giddiness, nervous diseases, piles and all diseases arising from a disordered condition of the stomach and liver. They cleanse the Blood, Strength the Stomach and Bowels, Equalize the Circulation, Obviate Costiviness, and Restore the System to a Healthy Action. They will be found invaluable as a preventive to FEVER AND AGUE, REMITTENT AND INTERMITTENT FEVER and all other diseases peculiar to a malarious climate.

The label of the 1930's states:

> Poor Man's Family Bitters is only recommended for the relief of temporary constipation and should not be used habitually for it may develop 'laxative habit.' In case of nausea, vomiting, and severe abdominal pains, do not use as a laxative. These are symptoms of appendicitis. Consult your physician. Poor Man's Family Bitters are not to be used by children under 12 years.

This last label certainly reflects a greater respect for truth in advertising. It also evidences a result of the hue and cry in the early 1900's for just such an occurrence. Millions of dollars and many

lives had been squandered on the ill-advised use of these preparations based upon their specious claims. The late well-known author from the Auburn area, Samuel Hopkins Adams, wrote a series of articles in *Colliers* magazine in late 1905 entitled, "The Great American Fraud." This exposure helped to hasten the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Laws of 1906, which did much to curb these abuses.[7]

Supplement to Bitters Bottles, also by Richard Watson, lists "Oswego Bitters" by "Austen & Co. Oswego, N.Y." Watson comments that "The label claims this to be 'the cheapest and most efficacious medicine in the world.' "[8] Unlike the Poor Man's bottle which is rectangular and aqua, this bottle is oval and amber. The price of twenty-five cents and the name are embossed on the front. W.J. Austen was also located on West First Street and he, too, was a

Poor Man's and Oswego Bitters bottles. *Author's collection.*

druggist. His company also had offices in New York City and in addition to this product made colognes and other diverse items such as baking power. I have an old wooden baking powder box which I found in the attic of the old Hunter store in Sterling Valley. I have had difficulty dating this operation with any precision, but I believe it flourished in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. According to the number and variety of trade cards I have seen, W.J. Austen was a real devotee of the advertising game. I have yet to find anything comparable for Poor Man's.

Watson has attempted in both his books to rank bottles according to rarity. At best this is a risky venture, and it is my feeling that, especially in the intervening years since publication, these two bottles have been found in sufficient quantities to warrant being classified somewhat less rare. However, they are certainly by no means common and, of the two, the Oswego Bitters is the harder to locate.[9]

Last year at a show and sale in Connecticut I was very fortunate to find and be able to purchase a pint Poor Man's Bitters Bottle. It is the same shape and color as the one-half pint. It also has the same embossing but there is no label. According to my source of supply it came from the Binghamton area. In no way could it have been produced in the mould I have referred to previously. It may have been part of a short run to test the sales potential, or it may have been manufactured for display purposes. It is not listed in this size and no one I have contacted to date has seen another of this type. This incident is one of the happier moments in the life of a bottle collector and balances out the tragedy of breaking a "treasure" or of finding out that you have been "had" in a transaction.

There were thousands more patent and proprietary medicines placed on the market as compared with the bitters. Hence, the bitters have been and are still looked upon as a more desirable item. Still, as more and more collectors join the ranks and as knowledge increases the patent and proprietary field will continue to grow in importance.

While I do not have any bottles from this next concern as yet, and while there is no listing in my books, the following excerpt from a publication, entitled *Historical Review*, published in the 1880's to extoll the virtues of various merchants and products of Oswego County has to be shared. I am not positive of the title and the exact date of issue because the first six pages which seem to relate to the city of Oswego are missing. The rest offers an excellent business summary of the villages and hamlets of the county.

Keenan & Co.
Manufacturers of Patent Medicines
69 Cayuga Street, Fulton, N.Y.

One of the greatest of growing industries in this section, and one which is, and ever will be, a benefit to humanity, is the manufacture of fine toilet and health articles by Keenan & Co., of Fulton, viz: 'The Toilet Cream,' for beautifying, purifying, and cleansing the skin; 'Aunt Ruth's Neutralizing and Vitalizing Cordial,' which was never equaled as a bodily strengthener and lief preserver; 'The Dream,' and the 'Golden Slipper,' two vegetable compounds, whose properties can be appreciated only when tried. The 'Fragrant Rosaline,' used for all skin diseases, a preparation unexcelled for healing properties, coolness to the skin, and refreshing feeling. These medicines have heretofore been sold by agents in different parts of the county, but the demand has increased so greatly that they are obliged to put them in the hands of druggists and general dealers.

THE HISTORY OF AUNT RUTH

Destined as she was by the hand of God, not only to mark the age in which she lived, but to be more influential, more beloved than any other woman on earth, reverently excepting the babe of Bethlehem. Chosen, as she believed she was by the great founder himself, to be personally instrumental in transmitting to posterity one of the greatest of gifts, whereby the human life can be prolonged from ten to twelve years above the present maxim, with a full enjoyment of all one's faculties under the benign influence of good health, which be obtained by the use of Aunt Ruth's Neutralizing and Vitalizing Cordial, manufactured and sold by Keenan & Co., successors to Aunt Ruth. The effect of these goods in promoting health and prolonging life is marvelous, as it effectively neutralizes all poison taken into the system, and stimulates all vital organs to a healthy action to such an extent that our deaths are not characterized by any great amount of sickness, but simply a wasting away from old age and a gradual extinguishing of the vital spark.[10]

So there! That seems to say it all! All you had to do was to sip Aunt Ruth's all day long and sit around half-crocked and nobody or nothing would bother you. This preparation had psychiatry, penicillin, and vitamin E all beat. Is there any other reason to wish for the "good old days?"

Although again not listed in my reference books, there is another bottle and business worthy of mention that was also located on West First Street in Oswego. This would be classified as a mineral water and is the Doolittle House and Deep Rock Spring. They

were both located near the site of the present Pontiac Hotel and Fortnightly Club, or, as the Oswego *Directory* of 1874 indicates, "Situated directly opposite the Post Office, Custom House and City Hall, in the very heart of the city, it is indeed an imposing structure, the architectural design and general finish being so unique, that it certainly forms one of the chief ornaments of the city."[11]

It should be emphasized that the Doolittle House was begun as an outgrowth of the discovery of the famous spring in 1870. Extolling the famous mineral water, the directory advertisement continues:

> Although so short a space of time has elapsed since its first introduction, THE DEEP ROCK WATER has already attained great popularity both as a pleasant and refreshing beverage, as well as a very efficient remedial agent, and by many is preferred to the waters found in the celebrated Saratoga Valley. As a beverage it is rapidly taking the place of those trashy compounds known as artificial waters. As a remedial agent it has been found very useful in cases of KIDNEY and BLADDER, particularly in Gravel or Stone in the Bladder, rapidly causing the disintegration and discharge of the stone or calculi, thereby affording immediate relief.[12]

An early Deep Rock Spring bottle — squat, round aqua. *Author's Collection.*

Let's see how the writer who spun the story about Aunt Ruth handles the Deep Rock Spring episode.

> The crowning attraction, however, of this splendid hostlery, are the waters of the now famous DEEP ROCK SPRING whose health giving streams have proved a boon beyond all price to hundreds who have partaken to them. From beneath the very foundations of this palace-like hotel, and from out of the solid rock, free to every guest, flows a fountain of life; the invalid comes, drinks, and goes home rejoicing. We have no space for testimonials, but their name is legion.

The earlier Deep Rock Spring bottle is a typical mineral water:

squat, round, aqua, with the name embossed. In later days the bottles were taller and more like the quart soda bottle we know today.

I have tried to share some highlights of information I have learned to date about a few of the more well-known glass bottles of Oswego County. There are many more bottles of local interest found throughout the territory—beer, whiskey, pottery, milk, decanter, food, and drugstore bottles. Also, several early physicians had bottles embossed with their names. There is enough material here for at least another entire article!

NOTES

1 Edwin A. Barber, *American Glass Ware* (Philadelphia: David McKay Co., 1900).

2 Stephen Van Rensselaer, *Early American Bottles & Flasks,* revised edition (Stratford, Connecticut: J. Edmund Edwards, 1971).

3 George S. and Helen McKearin, *American Glass* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1941).

4 Cecil Munsey, *Collecting Bottles* (New York: Hawthorn, 1970), pp. 65, 111.

5 Joseph K. Baldwin, *A Collector's Guide to Patent and Proprietary Medicine Bottles. of the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1973), p. 511, number 4147

6 Richard Watson, *Bitters Bottles* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), p. 179, number 262.

7 Arthur J. Cramp. M.D., *Nostrums and Quackery* (Chicago: Press of the American Medical Association, 1912).

8 Richard Watson, *Supplement to Bitters Bottles* (Camden, N.J.: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1968), p. 477, number 70.

9 As an interesting sidelight, a fellow member of the Empire State Bottle Collectors Association, Lloyd Baum of Hastings, left his home to go bottle digging. As he left, he told his wife he would bring back an Oswego Bitters—and ıe did!

10 R.C. Burton, *Historical Review of Oswego County* (Watertown, N.Y., 1889), pp. 8, 30.

11 Andrew Boyd, *Oswego Directory for 1874-1875* (Oswego, 1974), p. 74

12 *Ibid.*

13 Burton, *op. cit.*

The Richardson-Bates House

*Linda A. Wesner**

Towering above the surrounding homes on Oswego's east side, the Richardson-Bates House is an elegant example of post-Civil War Italianate architecture. The tall, narrow proportions of this brick Tuscan villa-styled home are complemented by Florentine-arched windows, an ornately bracketed cornice, a second floor balcony, and an imposing tower. Reflecting the Egyptian vogue of the 1870's a pair of sphinxes solemnly guard the front entrance.

Through the massive wooden doors was the Victorian sanctuary of the Richardson family—Naomi; her two bachelor sons, Maxwell and Laurence; a married daughter, Harriet Bates, and her son, Norman L. Bates. The leading member of the household was Maxwell, a prominent business and social figure in Oswego. For over a quarter of a century, Max embellished the interior of the family home with a variety of paintings, art objects, stuffed animals, and bric-a-brac.

In 1914, a few years after the death of the last Richardson, Norman Bates moved his wife, Florence, and their four children from West Fifth Street into the family home. There, the four Bates children—Elizabeth, Sarah, Maxwell, and Norman—grew up, married and then moved away. Norman L. Bates, Sr., died in 1923, and his wife in 1945. To insure the preservation of the house its Victorian interiors, the surviving Bates children donated the property to the Oswego County Historical Society.

Today, under the guidance of a professional staff, the Society continues the work of preservation, interpretation, and restoration of the house and its first-floor period rooms—rare surviving examples

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*Mrs. Wesner undertook her study of the structural evolution of the Richardson-Bates House while a student at S.U.C.O. working as an intern with the Oswego County Historical Society. She has most recently served as the Society's education assistant.

of life in Oswego in the 1890's. The second-floor areas are now devoted to the presentation of Oswego County history through permanent and temporary exhibitions.

One would expect the structural history of the Richardson-Bates House to be well documented. But, until very recently information was limited to a minimal account handed down through the decades by word of mouth.

According to this oral tradition, the older part of the house, including the hall, reception room and drawing rooms, had been a wedding gift to Naomi Bennett Richardson in 1850. The library and dining room section had been added later, sometime during the 1870's or 1880's.

Since the architect's plans of the earlier (north) section and several undated photographs were the only pertinent source materials available in the Society's collection, research entailed piecing together data found in deed books, city directories, as well as cemetery, probate, and tax assessment records.

When given to the Historical Society in 1946, the boundaries of the property included lots 133, 134, and 135. The house straddles lots 133 and 134; lot 135 is used as a yard and a driveway. No transactions for these first two lots were recorded around 1850, the date assigned by oral tradition. However, ten years earlier, on December 19, 1840, lot 134, measuring sixty-six feet in width and two hundred feet in depth, was purchased from Gerrit Smith by Jesse Bennett, Naomi Richardson's father, who was an attorney and real estate speculator.[2]

It is not known if Naomi and her attorney husband, Jacob Richardson, built their wooden house soon after 1840 when lot 134 was purchased or if they waited until 1850, when they bought lot 135.[3] However, at least as early as 1852 the Richardsons were living at 135 East Third Street.[4] Their original house, a modest wooden structure, could not have been a wedding gift—unless a very belated one—since their first son, Maxwell, was born in 1838, two years before Jesse Bennett purchased lot 134.[5] Perhaps the wooden house was built in 1850, as stated in the oral tradition, and through the years became mistakenly known as a wedding gift.

In 1854, four years after lot 135 was purchased Jacob Richardson, then Collector of Customs, died. His sudden death from an apparently chronic ailment aroused much public sympathy.[6] As far as is known, he left no will. However, the probate record estimated the value of Jacob's estate at twenty thousand dollars. The administrators of his estate, Jesse Bennett, Morris Bennett

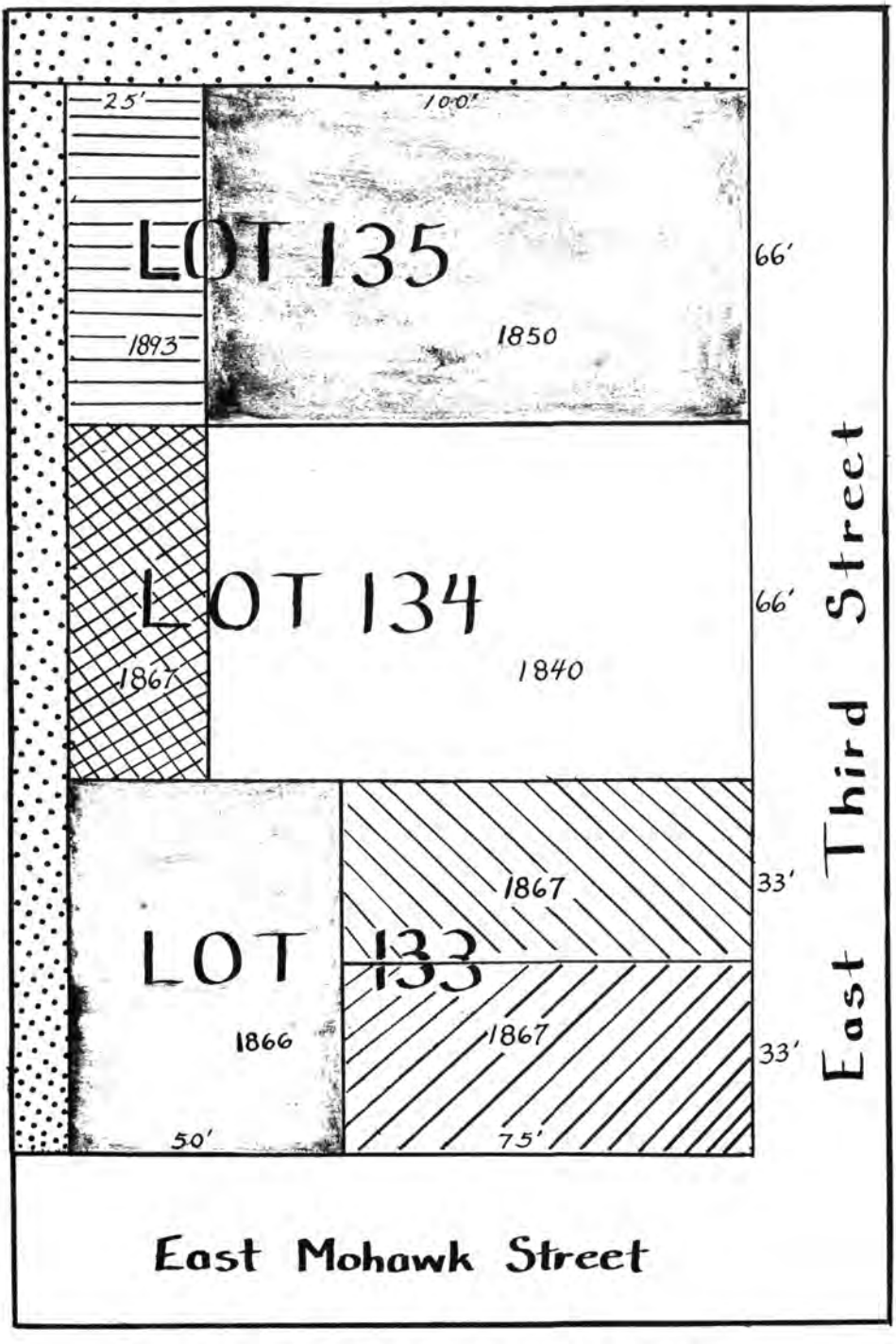

Figure 1. Plan of lots 133, 134, 135. *Courtesy of the author.*

(Jesse's brother) and Naomi Richardson, took out an administrator's bond for forty thousand dollars.[7]

The fact that Jacob died intestate might have prompted his father-in-law, Jesse Bennett, to make his own will several weeks later. Bennett left his wife, Harriet, the sum of one dollar per day. To his daughter, Naomi, he left the western half of lot 134, the site of the house in which she had already been living, as well as ten thousand dollars. As the will further directed, ten thousand dollars was set aside for each of the Richardson children, Maxwell, Laurence, and Harriet, as well as two other grandchildren. They were to receive the principal at age twenty-one, but until that time the interest was to be used for their support and education. A widowed sister-in-law, Elizabeth Bennett, was also willed ten thousand dollars, while an unidentified woman, Lorinda French, was to receive five thousand dollars.[8]

During the 1850's, Naomi and her three children continued to reside at 135 East Third Street.[9] In 1859, her father, Jesse Bennett, died.[10] That same year, Maxwell Richardson turned twenty-one and was, therefore, entitled to his inheritance. He had been operating a grocery business at 33 East Bridge Street, but by 1861 was studying law.[11]

A year later Maxwell established his law practice at 98 East Third Street, continuing to live at 135 East Third Street with his mother, brother, and Uncle Morris Bennett. In 1866, Maxwell was elected mayor of Oswego at the young age of twenty-eight and was active in law and real estate.[12]

The family still resided in the modest wooden structure located on lot 134. A leading, young, and well-to-do gentleman such as Maxwell would seem to require a new residence befitting his prominent stature in the city. The time was opportune for the building of a new, more imposing home, especially since money was no problem because of his Bennett inheritance and profitable business transactions. However, the Richardsons owned only lots 134 and 135; they needed more property on which to build.

Beginning in 1866, Naomi bought piece-by-piece lot 133 at the corner of East Third and Mohawk Streets. As shown in figure 1, she first purchased fifty feet on East Mohawk Street which extended southerly sixty-six feet across lot 133. In 1867, she bought the northwest corner of lot 133, measuring thirty-three feet on East Third Street and seventy-five feet deep on East Mohawk Street, for fifteen hundred dollars.[13] On that same day in September, Naomi added twenty-five feet in depth to lot 134 on which her wooden house stood. The deed expressly stated that " . . . the party of the second part [Naomi] shall never at any time in the future, erect or construct any buildings without written consent of the first party."[14]

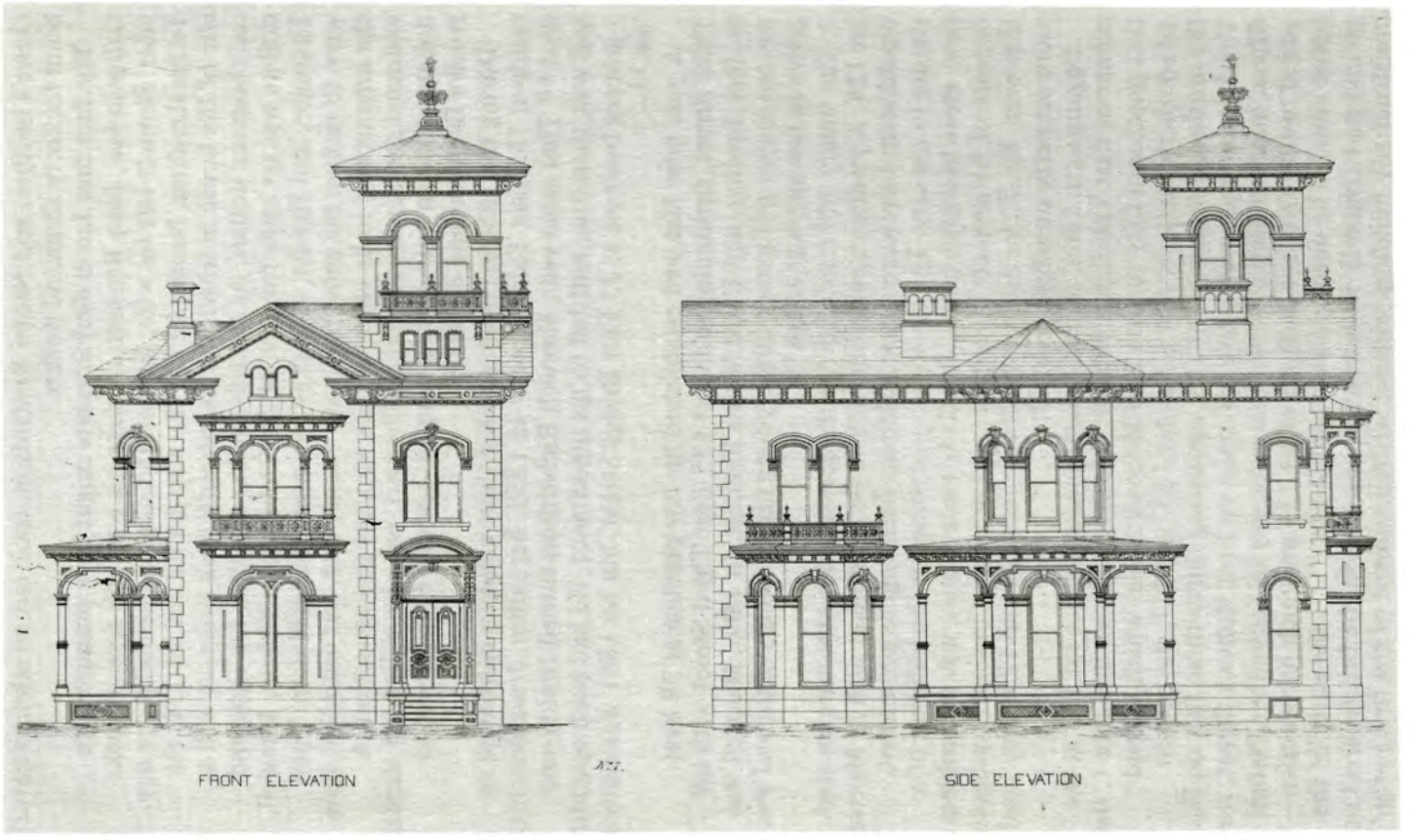

Figure 2. Architect's rendering of the initial brick addition to the Richardson home as designed between 1867 and 1871 by A.J. Warner & Co., of Rochester for Max. B. Richardson. ***OCHS Collection.***

Quite possibly the seller has heard rumors that the Richardsons were planning to expand.

Within two months Naomi had purchased the last section, measured thirty-three feet in width and seventy-five feet in depth, of lot 133.5. Thus, by the end of 1867, lots 133 and 134 were completed to their present boundaries and, at last, the Richardsons owned the entire corner property.

The well-known architectural firm of A.J. Warner & Co. from Rochester was engaged to design the new brick addition in the popular Tuscan villa-style. Of special interest is the notation found on the plans, "Hon. Max B. Richardson's House," thus indicating that Maxwell, not Naomi, supervised construction of the new wing.[16]

Figure 3. View of the Richardson home about 1875; note "original" wooden structure to the right. *OCHS Collection.*

Since the firm of A.J. Warner & Co. operated from 1867 through 1871, the date of the addition can be approximated during those four years.[18] As shown in figure 3, it was attached to the original wooden structure. The family used the new section's first floor for entertaining, while continuing to use the earlier wooden structure for cooking facilities and sleeping quarters.

Attachment of the two sections was seemingly temporary for each had a different scale and architectural style. Within a few years the original wooden house was torn down and in its place a three-story brick wing was constructed to complement the earlier brick construction.

Information currently available regarding the date of this later brick addition is conflicting. For example, sample tax figures for the Richardson property are:

1867. . . $4,000	1876. . $13,000
1868. . . $5,000	1877-8. $22,000
1869. . . $7,000	1879. . $20,000
1870-3. $10,000	1901. . $16,000[18]

The years from 1867 to 1873 show a steady increase which could have resulted from gradual appreciation through building of the initial brick addition. The sizable jump in assessment from $13,000 in 1876 to $22,000 in 1877 is of special interest for it would seem to indicate that the house as it is known today was completed, since later assessments decrease, then stabilize.

But, several other sources conflict with the tax assessment records. In a city atlas of 1880, the wooden part of the house is still indicated. [19] An insurance map of 1883, again depicts the same brick and wooden structure.[20]

The date of the later brick construction is further obscured by the remembrance of Louis Lavonier's son, who recalled that his father carved the woodwork in the library and dining room in 1891 and 1892.[21] If 1877 was the date of completion of this later section, as indicated by the assessment figures, it seems strange that Maxwell would have waited until 1891 to finish the interiors of these two rooms.

Since Naomi died in 1890, Lavornier might possibly have worked on these two rooms slightly earlier than his son remembered as suggested by the initials "NR" carved in the dining room.[22] At any rate, Naomi's death pinpoints the completion of the exterior of this later section to 1890, or before, because a family photograph shows Maxwell, Naomi, and Harriet on the porch while originally stood on the front of the library. (See figure 4.)

By 1910 all of Naomi's children had also died.[23] With the passing

Figure 4. Max, Naomi and Harriet Richardson on the porch of the south addition, ca. 1885-1890. Naomi's death in 1890 helps establish a cutoff date for this construction. *OCHS Files.*

of those who lived and worked at 135 East Third Street, as well as the dispersal of family documents, much of the story of the Richardson-Bates House became shrouded in mystery. Hopefully more information will be discovered to further lift the veil obscuring the history of this uniquely interesting structure.

Figure 5. The Richardson-Bates House as completed by Max Richardson, ca. 1890. Note the original north and west porches. ***OCHS Files.***

NOTES

[1] Beulah S. Schroeder, "Internments in Riverside Cemetery, Oswego, New York, 1855-1910, and Records of Fourth and Fifth Ward Cemeteries, Oswego, New York" (typescript, 1972), p. 37. Norman L. Bates was born in 1865 and died in 1923. Florence Matilda Morley Bates, his wife, was born in 1878 and died in 1945.

[2] Deed, Gerrit Smith to Jesse Bennett, December 19, 1840, Oswego County "Register of Deeds," vol. 32, p. 233. Knorr & Hancock, ed., *Oswego Business & Residence Directory* (Oswego: Richard Oliphant, 1852) p. 203.

[3] Deed, Robert J. and Sophia Van De Water to Jacob Richardson, August 10, 1850, "Register of Deeds," vol. 54, p. 432.

[4] Knorr & Hancock, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

[5] Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 166

[6] *Ibid.* Jacob Richardson was born in Springport, New York, on January 24, 1808, and died July 24, 1854. On July 26, 1854, an obituary appeared in the Oswego *Times and Journal:* "About a week ago Mr. Richardson left here on business at Kingston, where he was taken with chronic diarrhea, a complaint to which he has long been subject at this session . . . he died last night after a brief but painful struggle, surrounded by friends and relatives from this city . . . The remains of the deceased came in this afternoon by the steamer *Cataract* from Kingston, and were followed by a large number of citizens to his late residence."

[7] Estate of Jacob Richardson, Oswego County Surrogate's Court, file 2/R.

[8] Deed, by virtue of the will of Jesse Bennett to Naomi Richardson, July 13, 1859, "Register of Deeds," vol. 126, p. 453.

[9] Oswego City Directories, 1852-1859.

[10] Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Jesse Bennett was born on April 16, 1785, in Weston, Connecticut, and died in Oswego on June 25, 1859.

[11] Oswego City Directories, 1859, 1861.

[12] *Ibid.*, 1862-3, 1866-7.

[13] Deed, Catherine and Orace Stone to Naomi Richardson, June 11, 1866, "Register of Deeds," vol. 111, p. 14; and Deed, Deborah, Edwin and Ida Rheubottom to Naomi Richardson, September 2, 1867, vol. 117, p. 121.

[14] Deed, Lucy Allen to Naomi Richardson, September 2, 1867, "Register of Deeds," vol. 117, p. 117.

[15] Deed, Sarah Burlingham to Naomi Richardson, November 1, 1867, "Register of Deeds," vol. 117, p. 493. In addition, a strip of land one foot wide and seventy-five feet deep on the north wide of lot 134 was included in the purchase. In 1859, Jesse Bennett had sold this section to Sarah Burlingham (vol. 71, p. 626).

[16] A.J. Warner & Co., "Plan & Sections of the Cut Stone Ashlar and Sills for the Basement of Hon. Max. B. Richardson's House, Oswego, N.Y." (Rochester, 1867-71), original architectural drawings in the collection of the Oswego County Historical Society. Rochester City Directories, 1867-8, 1872.

[17] Andrew Jackson Warner (1833-1910) was a leading architect of Western New York. Originally from New Haven, Connecticut, he came to Rochester at the age of sixteen to begin a seven-year apprenticeship in the architectural office of his uncle, Merwin Austin. (Charles Elliott Fitch, *Memorial Encyclopedia of the State of New York*, 1916, vol. 2, pp. 303-4).

Warner and his uncle maintained a partnership for several years, but in 1867 Warner formed his own business with Charles Coats. In 1876 Warner engaged a different partner, J.G. Cutler, and from 1877-1892 was in partnership with his nephew, Frederick A. Brockett. His son, Foster J. Warner, later joined the business, and after his father's death in 1910 continued the firm. (Rochester City Directories, 1861, 1867-8, 1876-7, 1877-8, and 1892-3).

One historian noted, he " . . . had the highly developed faculty of visualizing a projected building before a line was drawn, but so thoroughly did he study a location that, after the material to be used was dediced upon, a vision of the building arose in his mind and from that time it was but a matter of architectural detail." (Fitch, p. 304).

Among the noted buildings in Rochester designed by A.J. Warner are the Brick Church, First Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church, Powers Block and Hotel, Ellanger and Barry Building, City Hall, Second Court House, entrance to Mt. Hope Cemetery, and Lyceum Theater.

18 Tax Assessment Records, City Tax Assessor's Office, Oswego.

19 C.E. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Oswego, New York* (Philadelphia, 1880), p. 15, plate B.

20 Continental Insurance Company, *Oswego, New York* (New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., 1883), plate 17.

21 Dr. Helen M. Breitbeck, "Life and Career of Louis Lavonier, Woodcarver Extraordinary," Oswego County Historical Society *Yearbook*, XXVII (1964-5), p. 39.

22 Schroeder, *op, cit.*, p. 166. Naomi Richardson was born on March 21, 1817. and died on November 13, 1890.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 37, 166. Maxwell Richardson was born on August 20, 1838, and died on July 2, 1903; Laurence was born on September 4, 1840, and died on March 12, 1910; and Harriet R. Bates was born on December 14, 1842, and died on August 31, 1908.

Constantia Industries: Williams-Southwell Sawmill and the Constantia Iron Foundry

*Leonard J. Cooper, Sr**

The Constantia iron foundry (1814-1897) and the Williams-Southwell sawmill (1820-1920) were both badly damaged by the great flood of 1897. The Williams sawmill was sold to a Mr. Southwell who was able to rebuild a water power dam and to repair the mill buildings and their damaged machinery; thus the sawmilling industry began once again after the tragic destruction. On the other hand, the Constantia iron foundry was far beyond repair and the expensive bog iron mining operation did not warrant its reconstruction.

In the beginning of the Constantia iron foundry operation in 1814, it depended upon steam power for its source of energy, but with the construction of the great Williams sawmill in 1820, both industries began to share the huge Williams raceway and the mutual source of water power. Thus, both industries operated from 1820 until 1897 in close harmony with each other; therefore, their histories have a close relationship for a period of seventy-five or more years.

Reading the poem spoken by Willie Cughan on Christmas Eve of the year 1897, one can comprehend the vast destruction caused by the tragic cloud burst and thus understand the great economic loss to the vicinity of Constantia with the destruction of fifteen lumber mills and other related industries. This thriving community almost came to a standstill and the population of the area gradually dwindled from 1500 to 800 citizens in a brief period of time.

The Constantia Iron Company was incorporated on March 9, 1814.

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The manufacture of iron was a flourishing business until the flood of 1897, although business was at a low ebb after 1893 due to the lack of local resources. During its life span of eighty-three years, there were several owners due to the constant need for new capital. Expensive bog iron mining on the lowland and areas of the north shore of Onedia Lake and along the bed area of Scriba Creek was a constant drain on the profits of this industry. By 1893, the bog iron mineral was mostly depleted in the vicinity of Constantia, and iron ore became very expensive to ship by train from the Minnesota mines. When the flood of 1897 destroyed the main building site, it was not possible to re-establish this unprofitable industry.

The main structure of the Constantia iron foundry was one hundred feet long and sixty feet wide; a lofty building made from cement, iron and wood with the center height of thirty feet. The foundry was said to have had one of the highest smoke stacks in Oswego County. In 1839, this stack fell during a severe windstorm and did considerable damage to the entire roof structure. A new stack was erected and the roof was repaired by January of 1840. In addition to the main building, there were several sheds erected for the storage of wrought iron, sand, limestone, pine knots, and manufactured iron molds.

The foundry was located about 250 feet north of the present fish hatchery building. A stone slab marks the northwest corner of the foundation. George Philo, superintendent of the fish hatchery, made sure that this slab of cement would remain there for posterity when the foundation was removed in 1940. The foundry was located on the west bank of Scriba Creek before the flood of 1897, as the creek flowed in a circle to the east of the iron company in the vicinity of the present hatchery building used for the storage of nets. After the flood, Scriba Creek took a more direct course, thus locating the iron foundry buildings on its east bank.

The mining of bog iron was a very difficult operation. Crafty teams of horses were used to plow and rake iron ore from bogs located in the lowland areas of Oneida Lake and Scriba Creek. Old-timers such as Homer Tallcott, Charles Farnett and Henry Marcellus told of many horses being lost in the swamp areas of Toad Harbor when they were dragging for bog iron. After the bog iron was mined from the shore areas, it was loaded on flat boats which were drawn by mules along the tow path to Carter's dock at the end of Redfield Street.

About seventy men were employed at the main foundry to keep the blast furnace in constant operation on a twenty-four hour basis. Charles Farnett, a workman in the foundry, related the following to me in 1937:

Three men were employed for each eight hour shift to feed the hungry blast furnace and to maintain the proper temperature to smelt the iron ore; ten men worked on six hour shifts to drag off slag; ten men worked on each eight hour shift to tap and to draw off the liquid ore by knocking out clay plugs from the iron hole near the bottom of the bosh. In the draw-off, the molten metal flowed into a brick-lined gutter, then it was poured into brick-lined metal buckets. The buckets were then elevated and they were carried by a series of pulleys and cables operated from shafts powered by the huge water wheel that was fed by the flume extending from the Williams saw mill after 1820. These buckets were carried to the pig-casting machine. At the pig-casting machine two to three men poured the liquid metal from the buckets into a series of molds.These molds were then carried into and out of this machine by a conveyor system. As the molds left this machine, six other men would be in charge of the water-cooling to enable the pig-iron to drop from the molds. Then, the molds were stacked in sheds ready for shipment by way of the Erie Canal to New York City.

Old-timers claimed that the Brooklyn Bridge iron had its source from the Constantia iron foundry.

Homer Tallcott told me that the foundry had a blast furnace of cylindrical metal shell lined with brick. This furnace was twenty feet in height, tapered near the top, and at the bottom were several tubular openings thorugh which air-blast was forced. I understood Mr. Tallcott to say that this area of the furnace was known as the "bosh."

After the flood, all salvage equipment was sold to a foundry somewhere in Pennsylvania. Eugene Whiting told me in 1937 that he recalled seeing all of the equipment loaded on railroad flat cars for shipment to its new location, but he was not sure of the name of the town or of the iron company.

It is interesting to note that the Ontario and Western Railroad hauled away tons and tons of slag from the Constantia foundry to help build a firm foundation for their railroad bed sometime after 1865. Henry Marcellus and Homer Tallcott told me that the railroad bed was built from a mixture of clay, sand, rock and iron slag to give it a firm foundation along the north shore area. William Howard, a track foreman with this railroad, supported the story. He also stated that the railroad later consumed all of the slag from the Constantia foundry for building similar foundation in the swamp areas.

As near as I can figure from legends told to me by the old settlers, about two hundred people were employed in occupations related to the iron foundry. About fifty men and horses were engaged in the

mining operations, and there were thirty or more men in the business of hauling bog iron by mule and flat boat. About ten men did the hauling of bog iron from Carter's dock or Scriba Creek to the Constantia foundry sheds; about fifteen men were engaged in the transportation of manufactured iron molds either to Carter's dock before 1869 or thereafter to the railroad station loading platform; also, twenty or more men were in the occupation of hauling sand or limestone from the vicinity of Bernhards Bay or Cleveland, New York. [These figures were taken from notes obtained from John Clough around 1938.] One can see that the Constantia Iron Company was a thriving industry in its heyday.

A brief summary of the many owners of the Constantia Iron Company from 1814 to 1897 and their different interests:

1814-1830 Edward B. Judson, Sr., was the chief founder of the Constantia Iron Company and he operated a thriving industry for sixteen years. He sold his business for a considerable profit in 1830.

1832-1834 The new owners were known as the American Iron Company. During their two years of operation, they tried to over expand the business and later sold stock to the many workers to salvage the finances of their corporation. The business was sold at a great loss in 1834 to a two-man partnership. It was during this period that the old-timers claimed that iron went to rolling mills in New York City for the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge.

1834-1836 The principal owners were Nathan Stiles, John Coffin and other small stockholders. Again, the operation was in financial trouble from lack of good management and continued over expansion. The partnership bailed out of its financial troubles by selling their interests to the Oneida Furnace Company.

1836-1842 The chief stockholders of the Oneida Furnace Co., were Moses Lester, C. Woodbridge, and J. Tucker.

1842-1844 After six years of small profits, the operation was sold to Newton Dexter, Moses W. Lester, and Hiram Blanchard who suffered much the same financial difficulties. As the ownership changed during the period from 1830-1842, Edward B. Judson held a considerable first mortgage with a high rate of interest, creating great financial strain for the owners. In 1844 Edward B. Judson, Jr., became the last owner.

1844-1897 Edward B. Judson, Jr., renamed the operation by its original corporate title, Constantia Iron Company. Judson was president of the First National Bank in Syracuse. With good financial backing without a mortgage to sap away profits, the company operated in the black with good and fair profits from its last incorporation in 1844 until 1893 when the depletion of local bog iron mines made operation difficult and increasing unprofitable.

The Constantia Flood
Spoken by Willie Cughan,
Christmas Eve, 1897

A vast amount of rain had we in July '97
A moist and constant water change
Between the earth and heaven
For what went up came down again
And ten times more beside
And Scriba Creek did soon become
An Ocean wild and wide

Now Scriba Creek is a gentle stream
And generally glides along
In a harmless route at a harmless gait
A singing a harmless song
But a creek is a creek and its nothing else
And it wasn't designed to be
A strong right arm to the Mexican Gulf
Or the Mediterranean Sea.

And so when it rained and rained and rained,
And the waters came down in a chunk
Old Scriba Creek to a river grew
And it moved like a river drunk
For it rose and it rose at Gayville
And it rose and it rose down here
And it rose in about four minutes
Enough for a good long year.

And the bridges were knocked to pieces
And the bulkheads were knocked ker-slam
And it didn't care for a saw-mill
And it didn't care for the dam

But it rose and rose and spread and spread
It cut and it wore and tore
It mopped up the dirt in the highways
It carried away the floor

It roared with a bull like fury
It plunged with a bull like wrath
It didn't have any location
It didn't have any path
It was here, it was there, it was everywhere
It conquered wherever it went
It scooped up thousands of dollars
And never gave back one cent

And the logs came down and the trees came down
The rocks they were lifted along
With saw-mills and barns and acres of farms
And banks that were ancient and strong
And everything went before it
That couldn't get out of the way
And crumbled to dust and destruction
Like "the wonderful one hoss shay"

If the rain hadn't come like a deluge
If the dam up at Gayville had held
If the dam up at Carters had stood there

A view from the sawmill of the destruction caused by the flood of 1897. *Courtesy of Millard Hawk, Sr.*

If the volume of wet hadn't swelled
In short, if the flood hadn't flooded
There wouldn't have been any flood
And half of the town of Constantia
Had never been covered with mud

The moral of all this confusion
Is lost in confusion as great
You can charge it all up too cloud-burst
Gravitation, poor timber or fate
But this much is certainly certain
Whatever was solid or week
On the day that Constantia was flooded
The Universe sprang a leak.

The famous Williams sawmill was erected over a period of two years of planning and development from 1818 to 1820 when Constantia was still known as Rotterdam. This outstanding mill was located on Scriba Creek off Mill Street in the heart of the village.

To make this enterprise possible a huge raceway had to be cut along the west bank of Scriba Creek from an upstream dam to the vicinity of the mill. This raceway was about forty feet wide, ten feet deep and about eight hundred feet long; it was located about thirty feet off the present shoulder of Mill Street.

George Williams hired about fifty local citizens of special skill and other men with several teams of horses to make this extensive cut through rock and clay. After the cut was complete, Williams purchased hundreds of pitch-soaked hardwood timbers from the local Carter mill. Established in 1814 by Julian Carter this mill was located about two miles further upstream on the Scriba Creek. Thus the logs for the raceway would have been transported by way of Mill Street to the Williams location.

The pressure of the water for the raceway was controlled from the Williams dam by a hand regulated iron wheel which would raise or lower the flood gate. Ample water come through the raceway to operate the Williams sawmill on a year round basis. It is interesting to note that this raceway was deep enough to insure proper pressure and that the running water was free from ice during the below-zero winter season. The raceway, located about fifty feet above the present site of the fish hatchery dam, would fascinate tourists from the surrounding areas and often many local citizens would stand nearby to watch the magic and to hear the thundering water as it forced its way to the two huge water wheels that operated this early

The Southwell dam at the head of the raceway which fed both the Williams-Southwell sawmill and the Constantia iron foundry. *Courtesy of Millard Hawk, Sr.*

nineteenth century sawmill.

In 1937 early residents told me that these water wheels were about twenty feet in diameter and more than six feet in width. The wheels were constructed of local oak and iron, from the Constantia iron foundry, in the blacksmith shop of Charles Decker, Sr., on Frederick Street next to the present Methodist Church.

The water wheels gave power to huge iron shafts with different size pulleys for varying powers and speeds. In the main, one wheel gave power for the cutting of the huge logs from four to five feet in diameter and the second wheel gave power for cutting the smaller logs from one to three feet in diameter. Also, the second water wheel gave power to operate smaller saws for the manufacture of crate, furniture, barrel and building materials. The many belts that operated the several types and sizes of pulleys came from the Robertson tannery on Frederick Creek in the vicinity of the abandoned fish hatchery.

Rapidly moving water from the raceway passed through a flume six feet in diameter to feed each of the two mighty water wheels. The swift water entered this huge flume near the back porch of the present day Millard Hawk, Sr., home across the street from the Constantia Fire Department building. After the water fed these two wheels at the sawmill, it passed through another wooden flume, again about six feet in diameter, to feed the power wheel of the

Constantia iron foundry located about five hundred feet eastward down stream. Then the water returned to Scriba Creek to flow into Oneida Lake. As the water passed through these amazing water wheels, unusual power was generated to meet the needs of both the Williams sawmill and the Constantia iron foundry.

Logs were hauled in both winter and summer to the mill by way of the famous Salt Road and Mill Street. All fifteen mills located on Scriba Creek before the flood of 1897 used Mill Street to route their products to the vicinity of Carter's dock. It is interesting to note that each mill operator maintained a certain section of Mill Street by laying logs on this roadway. It is evident that this street became a very secure passageway for both winter and summer traffic of local citizens as well as the mill operators.

About one hundred people were given employment cutting timbers in the woodland. Their occupations included hauling logs from as far away as three to four miles to the mill, operation of the mill, stacking lumber to dry, and the delivery of mill products to Carter's dock for shipment by way of the Erie Canal. After the opening of the Ontario & Western Railroad in 1869, canal traffic began to gradually diminish and most shipments went by rail through New York State.

As the logs were delivered to the Williams mill, lumbermen unloaded the whole cargo over the bank to feed two different rollways. The large logs, four and five feet in diameter, would roll down shoot number one and the smaller logs were slid down the second shoot to feed the massive rip saws which were in constant operation. The horses hauling these logs had to have special shoes (cork-type) for good footing. Spare horses were housed in a shed near the present Methodist Church under the custodianship of the Decker blacksmith shop. If a horse became ill or corked himself, a spare was available. Often a spare horse traveled with two or three loads of logs to insure extra power whenever wagon wheels got mired in the spring mud or in deep snow. However, it was much easier hauling on sleds during the winter months when the ground was frozen. Once a pathway was made, after a one or two foot snowfall, the loggers could easily make a round trip in approximately two hours. During the winter, larger loads could be carried and areas could be reached where special roads had not been constructed during the other seasons.

The Williams mill operated on a ten-hour daily schedule from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. It allowed a shut-down from noon to 1 p.m. to give both man and beast a mid-day rest for food and relaxation. The workweek was from Monday through Saturday, leaving only Sunday as a complete day of rest. After attending a local church, hearing a one hour sermon, and acquiring all of the local gossip, the families returned to their homes for a Sunday feast prepared by

the hard working wives and the teenage daughters. After dinner, usually, relatives or neighbors would visit one another to exchange news from far and near. Then these hard working citizens would return to their own homes to attend their customary chores before getting a sound night's sleep to begin another logging workweek.

Loggers were paid one dollar per load while woodsmen received around thirty cents per day; mill workers' wages were two to three dollars per week prior to 1900. Interestingly, all workmen had to furnish and maintain their own tools, such as axes, saws, and whatever their craft might require.

A logger usually employed two men for hauling and he used four horses to haul each load of ten or more average-size logs. With good luck, a logger could make four or less round trips on a daily basis. If he was hauling the logs four, five or more feet in diameter, his load would not exceed five logs. A logger paid his two hired men about seventy cents per day; thus, from simple arithmetic, he was operating his business on a gross profit of three dollars per day. From this income, the logger had to feed his animals and maintain his equipment. (Eugene Whiting told me that a logger was lucky to clear one dollar per day if weather and good fortune blessed him). Few loggers used oxen before 1900 as they were much slower and their use was less profitable. The horse hauling set-up lent more speed and greater flexibility.

Huge stacks of lumber were dried in the vicinity of the present Charles Ferry home and the Julia Thurston Library. Also, a large storage area for cured lumber was located near the Carter dock at the end of Redfield Street. After this lumber was cut, it was hauled on wagons or sleds by way of Linament Street, located on a lower level along Scriba Creek, to George Street (Route 49) and then Carter's dock on Redfield Street to be stored for shipment on the Erie Canal. (Before the flood of 1897, Linament Street crossed George Street). After 1869, huge stacks of lumber were stored in the vicinity of the present Vella's store for shipment by rail. Also, a railroad spur was built down the west side of Redfield Street to Carter's dock in 1869, but was discontinued sometime after 1890.

The Williams mill was badly damaged by the flood of 1897, but was later purchased by a Mr. Southwell who restored the mill operation in 1898. Many of the senior citizens of Constantia remember the Southwell enterprise which operated on a much smaller scale than the original Williams mill. Southwell did, however, a thriving lumber business until the closing days in 1920.

Of the fifteen lumber mills located on Scriba Creek at the time of the flood, only the Williams and Carter operations were repaired to continue business along side the four-story Scriba grist mill which had withstood the ravages of the flood.

Gradually the Southwell operation came to a standstill in 1920 due to competition from larger corporate enterprises and to the ill state of repair of the mill equipment following nearly one hundred years as part of the lumbering business in Rotterdam-Constantia.

The old settlers were able to tell me many exciting stories from the legends of the Williams-Southwell operations when I first came to Constantia in the year 1937.

Information was gathered over the years from conversation with the following old-timers: Henry Marcellus, John Clough, Homer Tallcott, William Howard, Richard Carter, Edith Winn, Holley Scoville, Claud Todd, Fred Tanner, Volney Munsell, Ray Dunn, Clarence Batchelor, Charles Farnett, Bertha Dobson, Caroline Grimsteed, Harlo Haynes, Eugene Whiting, Eugene Marcellus, Aura A. Cole, Wallace Coble, Thelma Hawk, Millard Hawk, Sr., and many other citizens. Without their help this history would not have been possible.

Remains of the Williams-Southwell sawmill following the flood of 1897. *Courtesy of Millard Hawk, Sr.*

Prohibition and the Corruption of Civil Authority in Oswego

R. Bruce McBride, Jr. *

The Volstead Act and the Eighteenth Amendment arrived at the lake port city of Oswego, New York, in a rather quiet manner. A majority of the city's 23,000 population stayed home Friday night, January 16, 1920, weary of Christmas and New Year's celebrations or perhaps wary of the wind and snow that increased with bitter intensity. Although newspaper predictions of a nationwide last fling did not materialize to the orgy stage, eighty or so couples managed to attend the funeral services for "John Barleycorn" held at the Pontiac Hotel on West First Street. They danced and drank until well after 12:01 when "John" was laid to rest, with Jack Gillman reciting a funeral oration. At Clancy and Muldoon's saloon on West Bridge Street, a curse was heard here and there along the brass-railed mahogany bar when the clock struck twelve. The C&M's patrons, nonetheless, continued their drinking and man talk, apparently oblivious to the fact that the oldest saloon in Oswego would be closed for good: its brass rail, back bar mirrors, swinging doors, tables and chairs, and bar paraphernalia destined for the auction block on Monday. M.J. Meehan's Third National Bank Restaurant closed early that night at six o'clock with the announcement that his saloon would not reopen "until the Constitution of the United States has been changed so as to permit a man to get what he wants to drink."[1]

There were, however, no organized protest parades or declarations against the advent of the Eighteenth Amendment with the exception, perhaps, of Mr. Meehan's early closing. The city's two newspapers, the *Daily Times* and the *Daily Palladium*, in fact, gave little notice to

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*Mr. McBridge received an M.A. degree from SUNY, Oswego, in 1973. This article is an outgrowth of his thesis, "Prohibition in Oswego, 1920-1933."

the sharp effect Prohibition would have on its readers. The *Times* reported, " . . . there are many optimists in the city who believe that someday John Barleycorn will return, but such people thinking so may as well become pessimists, for the wise ones know that the saloon is gone for good."[2]

The optimism of the *Times* was rather illusitory for within weeks after Prohibition Eve, Oswego's 108 saloons had been replaced by "soft drink" parlors, restaurants, and the new national institution, the speakeasies, found all about the city. These establishments were supplied with bootlegged or homemade whiskey, gin, wine, and beer by a large but informal network of bootleggers, rumrunners, home distillers, and home brewers who utilized every available means of transportation and disguise to retail their products. And so, in addition to the established gambling and prostitution activity, Oswego throughout the Prohibition Era continued to remain "an open town."

While many Oswegonians either supported or actively participated in widespread defiance of the Eighteenth Amendment in the city there were many groups, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League and other local temperance organizations and their sympathizers, who wanted enforcement of the law. Their efforts and petitions for local enforcement were stymied by the lack of federal Prohibition agents available to come to Oswego and by the general "hands off" policy maintained by the local police department in conjunction with City Hall and the business community.

Caught in this web of enforcement and non-enforcement was Police Chief Thomas Mowatt. "Tom was basically an honest cop," one former bootlegger said, "but he could not close the speakeasies because the politicians told him not to, and that was it."[3] Mowatt, a huge, husky man, was originally a resident of Toronto, Ontario, before coming to Oswego. In his years as police chief, from 1916 to 1947, he continued to receive the backing and praise from Oswego citizens for his efforts against crime despite the liquor and beer trade in the city and the corruption of his staff during Prohibition.

"Oh, Tom knew what was going on," Mr. A. recalls. "In fact, one night I was just about to close my place, when I see this head above the curtained window pane. Tom entered, looked around and said, 'A., there have been complaints that you've been running slot machines.' "

"Although I had slot machines before and after, at the time I didn't have any. Tom looked around, didn't see any machines, and said goodnight. He never mentioned the barrel of mash fermenting in the corner of the room."[4]

To rebuke criticisms for the non-enforcement that was to exist

in the city between 1920 and 1933, police and city officers utilized the argument that the Prohibition laws were federal statutes, therefore enforcement of these laws was an entirely federal matter. It was also pointed out that investigation and surveillance of illegal activity would be impossible since the speakeasy owners and bootleggers would know all the local policemen. Infrequently, when public clamor in the city arose against the speakeasies and "soft drink" parlors, or if a certain operator or bootlegger did not enjoy political patronage or protection, Chief Mowatt and his men would act.

At the end of April and during the first week of May in 1920, a variety of letters to the editor and articles appeared in the *Daily Times* and *Daily Palladium* concerning the large number of saloons that were running in the open. An indignant taxpayer wrote:

> Sir: Fellow Taxpayers:
>
> You are too short in your count when you say that there are three saloons in the 5th and 7th wards wide open.
>
> I know of five in the 5th myself. What is in the 7th, I do not know and I have wondered if it was on shoe strings or chocolate bars that those men were leaving there so elevated.
>
> Let there be an investigation and find out, please.
>
> Sore Taxpayer
> Oswego, April 30, 1920[5]

On the night of May 3, 1920, in an effort to placate public indignation, Chief Mowatt and a group of officers raided the Peru House, a hotel on the corner of East First and Utica Streets which featured a bar and prostitutes. They arrested Edward Coyer who was observed pouring whiskey into a glass. The barroom of the house was quite full on this Saturday night and when Mowatt reached for the bottle a wrestling match ensued during which most of the contents were spilled on the bar.[6] Coyer was taken to police headquarters and charged with selling liquor without a license, a state crime. On June 10 he was fined $750.00 and given a suspended sentence of one year. Although the Oswego *Daily Times* reported on May 5 that more raids were to follow, none did occur.[7]

Federal officers who frequently traveled north from Syracuse for

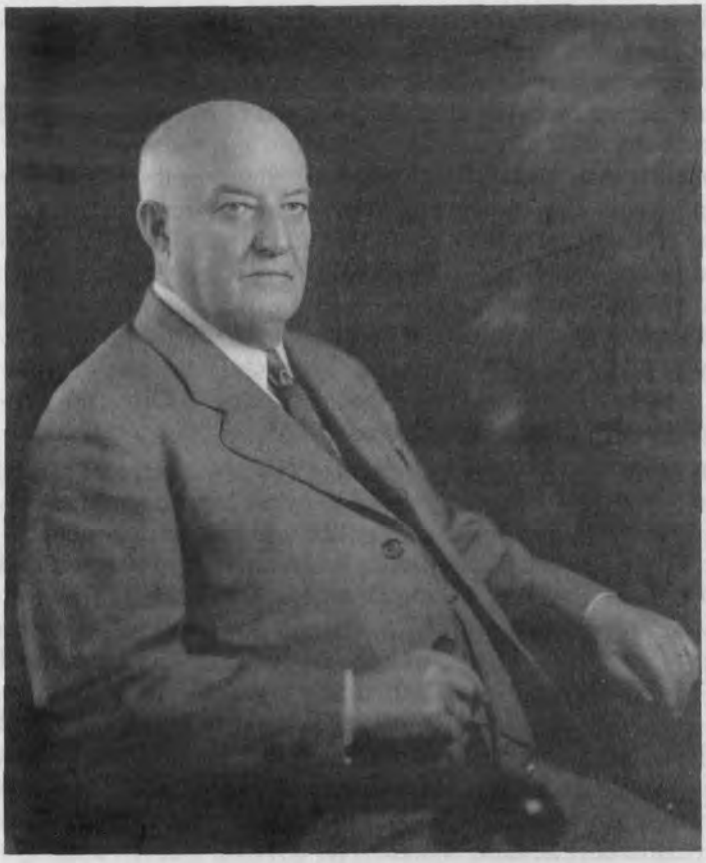
surveillance and raids were forced to go about their assignments without the aid of the Oswego police. In one instance when the harbor area was being watched during the week of November 1, 1921, the *Daily Times* reported that the police did not help because they were too busy with other things and could not spare any men.[8]

Ironically, it was true. Since 1918 vacancies in the police force and fire department due to death or retirement had remained unfilled because of a stalemate over appointments by a bi-partisan four-man fire and police commission. In 1920, the Oswego police department had only Chief Mowatt, Captain Charles Edland and ten patrolmen divided among two precincts. The typical schedule called for five men by day and six men at night to be on duty for twelve hour shifts. A state commission ruled that for a city of Oswego's proportions twenty patrolmen were needed.

There were many eligible candidates available from the civil service list who could have been appointed as provisional patrolmen for ninety days. Republican fire and police commission members, Edward Andelfinger and Frederick Scheutzow, however, consistently refused the appointment of one Democratic candidate, Andrew McNamara; therefore Democratic commissioners Frank Gallagher and Thomas Carroll, refused to appoint Republican nominees. The reason for Andelfinger's and Scheutzow's stubbornness, besides politics, was the fact that McNamara, popularly known as "Andy Mac," had a questionable reputation. Before Prohibition he operated a saloon that featured gambling and prostitution, and it was made public on February 17, 1921, that while McNamara was working as a ticket-taker for the Gem Theater, he coerced women employees into helping him resell tickets taken at the door.[9]

As this deadlock continued into the fall of 1920, it was announced that Governor Smith might suspend the entire police force for bootlegging activites and the theft of whiskey valued at $2,000.00 The *Daily Times* reported that government agents were at City Hall to conduct an investigation, while Police Chief Mowatt was said, " . . . to be unable to place a finger on the situation."[10] Other than the alleged bootlegging, the Governor's decision for such action stemmed from public indignation over the department's inability to arrest those individuals or gangs responsible for a wave of assaults and burgularies in Oswego that culminated with the theft of $4,000.00 worth of furs from George F. Campbell & Co. Campbell himself had dectectives from Syracuse sent in to conduct preliminary investigations as the Oswego police were unable to shed any light on the situation.

Throughout October the exact nature of the bootlegging charges leveled at the police department was kept from public scrutiny. It was evident that the mayor's office was trying to stall the inquiry



Mayor John Fitzgibbons. *OCHS Collection.*

into the matter. On November 4 Mayor John Fitzgibbons announced a cleanup of the police department admitting that certain members allegedly handled liquor in conjunction with bootleggers and speakeasies. The mayor noted that the investigation had been delayed because he had been unable to obtain legal assistance with regard to the proper procedure for such an investigation, since City Attorney John R. Pidgeon had agreed to represent several of the policemen involved.[11]

Finally, on December 23, charges were filed against John F. Otis, owner of a garage on West First Street (and mayor of Oswego in 1932), Charles Edland of the police department, and patrolmen Joseph Longhway and Edward Driscoll. The exact nature of the charges was not made public, but they reportedly concerned the theft of liquor from the garage owned by Otis. The matter was

settled out of court as announced on January 3, 1921, by Attorney F.E. Cullen who represented the defendants.

While the matter might have ended at this point, District Attorney Francis D. Culkin initiated "John Doe" proceedings with regard to the theft of two barrels of whiskey. Subpoenas suddenly fell like blizzard, not only to those initially charged, but also on saloon owners, James Farrell and M.J. Griffin; taxi owners, A.C. Guild and Henry Horan; Commissioner of Fire and Police, John B. Lee; President of the Fire and Police Board, Frederic A. Scheutzow; and Chief of Police Mowatt. Further subpoenas were later issued to Anthony Cummins, Thomas Daley of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and George O'Neil of Norwich, New York. These three were ordered to be held as material witnesses. After hearings were held by the Oswego grand jury on January 11, 1921 John Otis, Charles Edland, Joseph Longhway, and Edward Driscoll were indicted with the theft of eighty-five gallons of whiskey, posing as federal officers (the policemen), extortion, and conspiracy. Bail, which totaled $3,000, was paid by Otis. Driscoll, Edland and Longhway were freed from jail with the aid of Charles Gilmore, Dr. James E. Mansfield, R.G. Blackburn, William Handley, James H. Mackin, Joseph Kane and John Cullinan, who posted bail for the three policemen.

As the city anxiously awaited the January 14 trial date, Governor Miller ordered a detachment of state troopers from the Oneida barracks to police the city, the local police having been reduced to nine men following the suspension of the three officers. The troopers arrived on January 12, but could not assume their duties until the next day since specific orders from the Governor, required by state law, had not arrived.

In the meantime, a "cider drinking" epidemic had broken out in the city. Much of the fall apple crop had been converted into hard cider, so hard that many consumers were found lying intoxicated and unconscious in the snow-covered streets. On January 17, the *Daily Times* reported that a man by the name of Koska was found drowned in the harbor, apparently after he drank too much cider and accidentally fell off a pier.[12] Many letters and articles appeared in the newspapers protesting the situation and the following letter is a typical example:

> To the Editor of the *Times:*
>
> Sir: May I have space in your paper for a few lines?
>
> I hear that we are to have the state troopers with us but a short time. Why not, if possible, use them while here in cleaning up our city? One doesn't have to look far in any direction

without finding gambling dens and saloons running wide open, even on Sunday. May I say that yesterday very near our main street, there was a boy apparently not over sixteen or seventeen years of age, drunk, yes, drunk as any hardened old drunkard, and but a short time later two more boys in the same condition. We have tried to clean things up and failed, but with the police force that we have had, yes, and I may say the present city administration, could we expect things otherwise? Are there not men enough to step forward and look after these things? Reader, will you wait until your boy is brought home to you in a condition that will break your heart? It seems that now is the time to act.

(Signed)
ANOTHER MOTHER
Oswego, January 17, 1921[13]

From a plan conceived by District Attorney Culkin, troopers began to investigate Oswego cider places on January 26, taking samples of cider that were sent to the Syracuse University chemistry department for analysis. James Hoy of the Shakespeare Cafe, located in the Richardson Theater building, was fined $15 when he tried to prevent troopers from pouring a sample of his cider into a container. On February 4, those samples of high alcoholic content were returned to the authorities and many arrests followed.

The startling story, reflecting the extent and influence of the liquor trade in Oswego, and the politicians, businessmen, and bootleggers indulging in or sympathetic to it, was related to a packed courtroom audience during the week of February 18, 1921.[14] Indeed, it seemed that the whole city was on trial as the courtroom filled within five minutes after the doors were opened. By the second day, men were breaking windows to hear echoes of the proceedings against Commissioner of Health John Otis, Police Captain Charles Edland, and patrolmen Edward Driscoll and Joseph Longhway. The answer to questions that have gone clothed in rumor and myth throughout the last few months were neatly unfolded in the testimony of the policemen and the bootleggers.

The crux of District Attorney Culkin's case for the people revolved about the theft of two barrels of "Old Granddad" whiskey from John Lennox, an Oswego bootlegger, the financier of a shipment which eventually was to have been dispensed to various speakeasy establishments in the city. From the testimony of Lennox and the men he had hired to bring the whiskey to Oswego, it was learned that Longhway, Edland and Driscoll had posed as federal Prohibition agents as the three accosted Lennox's men in a garage

owned by John Otis on West First Street near Albany. Unfortunately, the three "agents" did not see another member of the Lennox group, George O'Neil of Oswego, who was awakened by the ruckus as he slept in the front seat of a nearby car. The three bootleggers were led away from the garage by Longhway and Edland and eventually taken to the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad coal trestle. Driscoll, in the meantime, remained in the garage and arranged with Otis to have the two barrels removed from the premises.

At the coal trestle, the bootleggers were told that they would be freed if they immediately left town. After they agreed, the three were led back to the garage where they were given oil and gas for their car by Otis and told that they better not return to Oswego. When one of the bootleggers asked what happened to their cargo, Otis told them that two strangers had pulled up to his garage in another car, rolled the barrels onto the vehicle and sped away.

Although the three bootleggers left Oswego without telling John Lennox what had happened to his whiskey, George O'Neil managed to escape from the garage undetected, and eventually contacted Lennox. Upon learning of the fate of his shipment, Lennox told Otis and the three Oswego policemen that he would file criminal charges if the whiskey was not returned to him. Lennox testified that during the second week of October, he was paid $1,644 by the defendants, but had decided to file charges despite the payment.

The four defendants were represented by Attorney John Woods of Syracuse, who argued that the whiskey, being contraband, had no value under law. In addition, his four clients denied the testimony given by the bootleggers. Driscoll, Edland and Longhway all testified that they had indeed raided the Otis garage where they had found the three bootleggers with two barrels of whiskey. They admitted taking the bootleggers to the coal trestle to get them to admit ownership of the whiskey, but that the men refused to budge. At this time the defendants said that the bootleggers pleaded with the police officers to let them go, since they claimed to have wives and children. The officers agreed and the men left Oswego in the Packard after Otis had given them gas and oil. Longhway and Edland testified that while they were with the bootleggers at the coal trestle, Driscoll had been sent back to the police station to fetch the patrol wagon in order to transport the confiscated whiskey into custody. It was at this time, according to John Otis, that while in his office he heard a car and saw three men place the unguarded barrels in a car and drive away.

Charles Scoville, a taxicab driver, brought new evidence to the case when he testified that one night in August he had received a call to go to the harbor to pick up a male passenger from the steamship,

King, The man, dressed in sailor's clothes and carrying various bundles of luggage, requested to be driven to "Joker" McCarthy's saloon. Outside of the saloon, Scoville and the sailor were stopped by Edland, Driscoll and Longhway who accused the driver and sailor of bootlegging and placed them under arrest. The officer got into the cab and ordered Scoville to drive to a pond outside the city limits. The cab was stopped and the bundles placed on the road. Leaving Driscoll behind, the group drove back to Oswego and down to the waterfront. During the ride Edland remarked that they ought to go see the captain of the sailor's ship to find out if he were implicated in the affair. According to the *Times,* Captain Heffernan of Tonawanda, master of the steamer which was engaged in the coal trade between Tonawanda and Oswego, told the Oswego grand jury during "John Doe" proceedings that he was compelled to pay $300 to Edland and Longhway. Otherwise, the two said that they would reveal to federal authorities that the whiskey came across Lake Ontario on his ship and he would lose his license.

On Saturday morning, February 20, summations were presented by Woods and District Attorney Culkin. Woods told the jury, composed of farmers living outside the city, that from the testimonies presented there was reasonable doubt as to whether his clients had either bootlegged or stolen the whiskey from Otis'garage. Woods pleaded for the jurors to remember that much of the evidence against the defendants was presented by confessed criminals. According to the *Daily Times,* "Mr. Woods went at length into the question of reasonable doubt . . . and said it was only necessary to look into the faces of the witnesses to see which side was telling the truth." The reporter for the newspaper was referring to the vast array of character witnesses that testified to the honesty and integrity of the defendants during the trial. They included Special County Judge, George M. Fanning; ex-Sheriff, L.J. Parsons; Superintendent of Highways, E.A. Howard; Deputy County Clerk, John J. Little; Chief City Assessor, Patrick Sheedy; ex-Mayor, Thomas F. Hennessey; physicians, Dr. A.C. Calisch and Dr. John Mansfield; and many businessmen such as Thomas Dietz, Jeremiah Haggerty and F.E Sweetland. In conclusion, Woods appealed to the jurors for an exercise of simple justice which would send his clients home to their families cleared of all charges of grand larceny and everything else.

Culkin, in his opposing arguments, stated that he had no desire to place laurels on the bootleggers who were menaces to their calling. The District Attorney told the jury that the policemen, however, had sworn their solemn oaths to enforce the law and, in turn, had been supported by the treasury of Oswego. "What good will come of convicting a few bootleggers," Mr. Culkin asked, "while grafting policemen could remain uncaught bootleggers and sell their booze on

the market." As he cited the numerous pitfalls in the defendants' testimonies, Culkin reminded the jurors that they had a duty to perform justice to protect the community of Oswego, no matter what their impulse and feeling might be. The situation, Culkin said, must be cleared up or it will grow steadily worse. He concluded that in the name of law and order, Otis, Edland, Longhway, and Driscoll be found quilty as charged.

The jury took not more than four hours to find the defendants guilty, but of petty larceny, not grand larceny. The *Daily Times* reported that there was a minority on the jury who had held out to the last minute until the less severe charge had been agreed upon. The *Times* surmised that the reason for the jury's leniency may have stemmed from sympathy for the money and mental anguish spent

Francis D. Culkin. ***OCHS Collection.***

by the defendants. The policemen, of course, would suffer, the *Times* predicted, since they were dismissed from duty without any pension.

On March 7, Judge Coville sentenced Otis, Edland, and Longhway to six months in the Oswego County jail. Edward Driscoll, because of family affairs, was given a lighter sentence of three months. The *Times* noted that the four defendants took their punishments as they stood before Judge Coville without any apparent change of countenance.[15]

John Otis made repeated attempts to have his case appealed. On April 14, 1923, the Court of Appeals affirmed the six month sentence. Otis' attorney, Francis Cullen, strove to appeal his client's case before the U.S. Supreme Court again on the grounds that the whiskey stolen on the night of September 23, 1920, had no value under the Volstead Act. This attempt was also unsuccessful as the Court ruled that although the liquor contraband was illegal, it indeed continued to have value, including the oaken barrels in which the liquor was contained.

John Lennox, the bootlegger whose whiskey was stolen, continued in the liquor trade, though with much difficulty. On May 19, 1923, Lennox was indicted by the Oswego grand jury for first degree larceny relating to the theft of government liquor certificates worth $750. He was sentenced to one year in jail on December 5 by Judge Culkin, who had been appointed county judge in March of 1922 after the death of Judge Coville.

Throughout the course of the trial Attorney Francis Culkin claimed the spotlight of attention as he skillfully conducted his prosecution of John Otis and the three policemen. Although one of his contemporari remembered that Culkin enjoyed alcoholic beverages and jovial gatherings, the "Captain" emerged as a staunch defender of Prohibition during his judgeship from 1922 to 1928, and as Congressman from 1928 to 1932. Unfortunate saloonkeepers, bootleggers and others emerged in the liquor trade that appeared before him could expect little sympathy. On June 17, 1922, Paul Sidera was sentenced to two hundred days in jail or a $200 fine for what was termed, " . . . trying to bring about the return of the saloon."[16] Before, on May 8, while serving as a visiting judge in New York City, Culkin served notice that he would impose the maximum sentence of Mullans-Gage Act on a drugstore proprietor in the Bronx who was selling "false" whiskey.

Although the Judge was harsh on those convicted of liquor violations he became a benefactor of youthful defendants. Immediately

upon his appointment in 1922, Culkin devised a probation system for minor offenders who before shared the same cells at the county jail with adult criminals, including those convicted of murder, rape, and the like.

Charles Edland and Joseph Longhway remained in Oswego to persue occupations other than law enforcement. Edward Driscoll worked for awhile at the Delmonico Cafe, a speakeasy on West First Street, and later became a guard at Sing Sing Prison, Ossining, New York.

Despite these events, the police deadlock continued for the remainder of 1921. The ranks of the decimated police force were further decreased when George Hanley was suspended on May 4 after drinking cider at the Farnum Cafe with an acquaintance who were later identified as an undercover detective. Although the cider was found to be non-alcoholic, Hanley was removed because he was supposed to be on duty that afternoon. His suspension ended on July 15 so that the remaining members of the department could take their summer vacations for the first time in three years.

The continuation of the police deadlock contributed, in the end, to the decline of Mayor Fitzgibbons' power and influence. The deadlock had attracted adverse state and national attention, which brought only ridicule to Oswego. In addition, city Republicans were making charges that the Fitzgibbons administration had indulged in juggling of city tax funds. In August Democratic leaders decided not to renominate Mayor Fitzgibbons, but instead asked James Mackin to run in November for the position. Mackin, who had never run for office, was unable to overcome the charges of corruption and incompetence leveled at Mayor Fitzgibbons and the Democratic Party, and was overwhelmingly defeated by Republican nominee, M. Prouse Neal. The day after the election, the *Daily Times* proclaimed that Oswego was now "A City Redeemed."[17]

The Neal administration was successful during 1922 in having the City Charter amended to eliminate the fire and police commission. Appointments for Oswego firemen and police were now based upon the discretion of the Commissioner of Public Safety who would choose from a list composed of those men who had successfully passed a civil service examination. On May 20, 1922, Fred W. Brennan, John Gilmore, Ray Furness, John Danio, and Vincent D'Cecio were appointed as probationary policemen, followed by the appointment of John Howly, Jake Haggerty and Paul Grulich on May 23.

The liquor trade in the city continued uninterrupted despite the restaffing of the police department and, more importantly, the existence of a state statute which postponed the argument by local authorities that enforcement of Prohibition was to be an entirely federal function. Passed in March of 1921 by the New York State Legislature, the Mullans-Gage Act authorized all state police departments the same authority that federal officials used as a basis for searches, seizures and arrests. The act's main proponent was Governor Nathan E. Miller who had defeated Alfred E. Smith in 1920 on a "dry" platform of enforcement of Prohibition in New York State. The legal basis for the Mullans-Gage Act rested on the Eighteenth Amendment which granted concurrent powers of enforcement to the states, thus making evasion of Prohibition a state crime as well as a federal crime if state legislation was enacted.

It is impossible, at this time, to relate the number of arrests that occurred during the period of Mullans-Gage in the city of Oswego for the police department's arrest records for this period were allegedly destroyed. A survey of the entire county shows that in 1922 there were a total of sixty-one indictments, twenty-one convictions, one acquittal and $3,700 collected in fines, all in connection with liquor violation via Mullans-Gage. Although these figures show increased Prohibition enforcement taking place in Oswego County (there were only sixteen arrests made in 1921 for selling liquor without a license), Mullans-Gage made only a small dent in the activities of the city and county bootleggers, rumrunners, and speakeasies.

The liquor trade in the city, moreover, was given further assurances that business would not be disrupted during January 1922 as the Oswego Common Council initiated a debate on the situation of lawlessness and corruption existing in the city. On January 26, the Council passed a resolution drawn up by Alderman Frederick Hinman that advocated the return of light wine and beer. To the resolution Mayor Neal attached an explanation for these actions stating that it was impossible to make Oswego clean and law abiding with regard to Prohibition under present conditions.[19]

The Council's resolution became the target of vicious criticism. On Sunday, January 29, J.H. Anderson of the Anti-Saloon League told the congregation of Trinity Church that the Council should be condemned for such an action, " . . . because they rushed through the resoultion before considering all the facts."[20] Anderson felt that the verdict was a political feeler of the pulse of a supposed dead corpse, for the Council had tried to see if the law should be enforced.

Although the Syracuse superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League felt that Mayor Neal wanted to enforce the law, " . . . he could not

do it amidst the awful conditions which prevail, unless he has a dry Judge, a dry prosecuting attorney, a cooperative police and the backing of every person in the city."[21]

The Oswego W.C.T.U., various church groups, and individuals were also not pleased with the Council's resolution and denunciations were heard from them throughout February. Anderson, meanwhile, continued his attacks on the Neal administration, and finally demanded on February 15 that Oswego citizens, " . . . go back where you came and appoint committeemen to aid in the enforcement you seek."[22]

Those Oswegonians displeased with the Common Council's action were no doubt enraged over the new turn of events that results in the cessation of enforcement of Prohibition by state and twenty local officials. In the election of 1921, New York voters returned Alfred E. Smith to office by a landslide. Although the Democratic platform did not mention repeal of the Mullans-Gage Act, as Smith was anxious for his future presidential amibitions, there was an expectant air that the act would be abolished.

The re-elected Governor received hearty support from Oswego city and county precincts, giving him 3,020 votes over incumbant Nathan Miller. The Prohibition Party, which nominated George K. Hinds, received only 130 votes and was eliminated from county voting machines due to such a poor showing. Smith's re-election was celebrated with parades, bonfires, and what the *Daily Palladium* termed, quick-fire. The *Palladium* also noted that many patronage jobs were ready to be dispensed throughout the county.[23]

As repeal of the Mullans-Gage Act grew iminent, a small cadre of city officials met with federal Prohibition Director Frank E. Sayer, also from Oswego, in 1923, to discuss plans for an assortment of raids to be undertaken before the New York Prohibition law became extinct. The idea for such a plan was drawn up by District Attorney Harry Stacy who was well aware of the liquor trade in the city at the time and the virtual "free reign" that would occur upon repeal of the Mullans-Gage Act. Sayer, a leading Republican in Oswego who had run unsuccessfully for mayor on several occasions, promised Stacy the full cooperation of his office. Sayer joined the Prohibition Bureau in 1921 and had attained the high position of Prohibition Director of the Syracuse office by March of 1922. Prior to his meetings with District Attorney Stacy, Sayer had paid many visits to Oswego, arresting various individuals engaged in the liquor trade. On the night of May 4 a small army composed of sixteen Oswego and nine Fulton policemen, eleven Deputy Sheriffs, and six officers from Sayer's unit assembled at the office of William P. Dempsey, Commissioner of Public Safety, at City Hall. The policemen had no idea what was to happen for the Stacy plan was known only to Commissioner Dempsey,

Sayer and Neal. As a result of the secrecy those to be raided were not "tipped off" beforehand

The various policemen were given search warrants for specific addresses as they were divided into groups. Commissioner Dempsey stayed in his office to dispatch trucks and automobiles, if needed, to pick up the confiscated liquor. Throughout the night over twenty-one saloons, speakeasies, and private homes were visited. Hundreds of quarts of whiskey, gin, white mule and hard cider were confiscated and twenty Oswegonians were arrested.[24]

On June 2, 1923, Governor Smith signed the Curvillar Bill which repealed the Mullans-Gage Act, thereby returning enforcement of Prohibition to federal authorities in New York State. While local, county, and state law enforcement officials were relieved of such duties, the *Daily Palladium* noted that the federal government "assumed that New York officials will continue to cooperate with Federal officials."[25] Governor Smith's approval for repeal immediately, however, permeated the surveillance and control of the liquor traffic coming to Oswego via the Canadian border. Soon it was reported that a bootlegger invasion was occurring along the northern border area where federal agents were outnumbered one hundred to one.

Oswego's reaction to repeal, on the whole, was quite favorable. Sheriff Schultz, John S. Parsons, and W.J. Dempsey agreed that the Constitution was still in effect and had to be enforced. James Watts of Butler's Pharmacy called the Governor "a sweetheart," while City Engineer James Burke said, "I presume there are many persons rejoicing today."[26]

Dr. Richard K. Piez of Oswego Normal School was somewhat angry. "We have two kinds of law," Dr. Piez stated, "the kind we want the other fellows to obey and the kind we break ourselves. We talk of radicals and Bolshevists, yet many of us meet and joke and talk at home and abroad of our open violation and evasion of a portion of the Constitution. As for Governor Smith, I am sorry the Governor, otherwise a good executive, acted as he did."[27]

The May 4 raid marked the last concerted effort by civil and federal authorities to halt the liquor and beer trade in Oswego until repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in December of 1933 when Mayor John Otis and Chief Mowatt concurrently warned all speak-easy proprietors and bootleggers that they would be arrested if they continued their liquor and beer operations without a New York State license. Chief Mowatt also declared that his men would be paying visits on those establishments that were operating with a license, " . . . but dispensing spurious varieties of the real stuff."[28]

Indeed, a great amount of illegal liquor and beer activity continued after repeal. The heyday of the bootleggers and speakeasy, however,

had ended in 1933-1934 and gradually all such operators conformed to the new state liquor laws, especially since local and state enforcement agencies were making a concerted effort to see that these statutes were obeyed. More importantly, as the *Palladium-Times* pointed out in 1934, the attitude of the Oswego population was to see liquor ordinances enforced, " . . . lest there be a return to the grafting era now happily past."[29]

NOTES

1 Oswego *Daily Times,* January 16, 1920.

2 Oswego *Daily Times,* January 7, 1920.

3 Interview with Mr. A, June 5, 1972. Mr. A is identified as such in keeping with this author's promise of anonymity as neither he nor I wish to jeopardize his standing in the community.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Letter to Editor, Oswego *Daily Times,* April 30, 1920.

6 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* May 3, 1920.

7 Oswego *Daily Times,* May 5, 1920.

8 Oswego *Daily Times,* November 1, 1921.

9 Oswego *Daily Times,* February 17, 1921.

10 Oswego *Daily Times,* October 16, 1920.

11 Oswego *Daily Times,* November 4, 1920.

12 Oswego *Daily Times,* January 17, 1921.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Information for the trial of Otis, Edland, Driscoll and Longhway, February 18, 19, 20, 1921, was compiled from interviews and from the Oswego *Daily Times* and Oswego *Daily Palladium,* those dates.

15 Oswego *Daily Times,* March 7, 1921.

16 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* June 7, 1922.

17 Oswego *Daily Times,* November 9, 1921.

18 Syracuse Chapter, Anti-Saloon League, 1922.

19 Oswego *Daily Times,* January 31, 1922.

20 Oswego *Daily Times,* January 31, 1922.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* February 15, 1922.

23 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* November 8, 1922

24 Oswego *Daily Times,* May 5, 1923.

25 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* June 3, 1923.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 Oswego *Palladium Times,* December 11, 1933.

29 Oswego *Palladium Times,* August 8, 1934.