

ROCHESTER HISTORY

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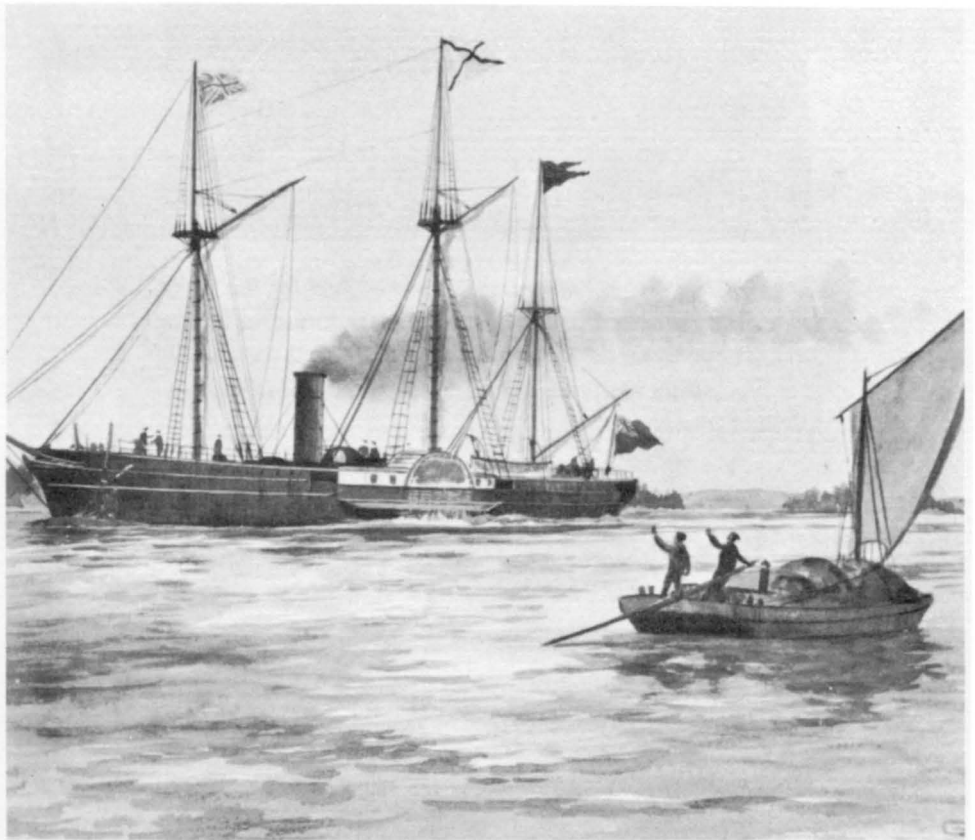
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Nos. 3 and 4

Entrepreneurship In The Genesee Country

George C. Latta by *Joan Sullivan*
The Cultivation of Flower City by *Dan Parks*





The H.M.S. Nancy, built in 1813, carried furs on the Great Lakes. The British Navy pressed it into service during the War of 1812. The commander burned it on Lake Huron to prevent the U.S. Navy from recapturing it. It has been raised and is on exhibit in Canada.

Cover: *The S.S. Frontenac, built in Canada in 1816, preceded the American S.S. Ontario by only a few months to become the first steam vessel on the Great Lakes.*

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Residence of George C. Latta, Esq., Charlotte.

George Clinton Latta: Merchant at the Port of Charlotte *by Joan Sullivan*

As a businessman and entrepreneur, Latta is representative of other pioneers in the Genesee Country.

In the earliest days of Pre-Revolutionary America, the water routes of western New York became the by-ways of a vigorous fur trade:

We read with amazement the account of two unknown French adventurers who left Three Rivers (Oswego) for the Far West, and of their success. A year having passed without any news from them, caused their friends to abandon any hope that they were living. Masses were said for the repose of their souls, as it was the belief they had been killed and eaten by the savages. After an absence of two years, they reappeared with a flotilla of canoes, crowded with Indians, and carrying furs worth \$120,000.³

Lake Ontario soon became an important link in the chain of water routes from the interior to the east coast that carried the frontier products to American and European markets. Forts were built along the lake that served not only as military outposts, but as commercial centers that required supplies and couriers as well. Out of that early experience, a pattern developed in which commercial rather than agricultural interests determined settlement, and locations for villages or central places were selected for their accessibility to natural resources and transportation routes.² Consequently, it was the frontier merchant as the "agent of everybody" who, as buyer and seller of frontier products (ashes, shingles, lumber, wheat, corn, whiskey), provided the first opportunities for expansion beyond self-sufficiency.³

George Clinton Latta (1795-1891), of the Lake Ontario Port of Charlotte, was an "agent of everybody," an integrator of community resources and needs and a visionary with ambitions in international trade. His success as an entrepreneur was the result of his exploitation of frontier resources, his family's political and business connections, and his personal business skills. Latta's entrepreneurial activities were the catalysts that not only generated his wealth, but influenced the social, political, and economic affairs of his community, Charlotte.

The importance of Lake Ontario, the Genesee River and the Port of Charlotte to the economic development of the Genesee Country was immeasurable, especially before the advent of the Erie Canal. As early as 1798, a French visitor to the "Chenessee River and Lake Ontario" noted that there was a lively trade of goods from the port . . . Flour which is bought for \$7 a barrel and sold for \$10 and \$14 and cattle on which they make about a hundred percent profit."⁴ Most of these goods were intended for a Canadian or east coast market. In six weeks in 1813, the Canal Commission of New York counted 630 vessels, an average of 15 per day that passed down the St. Lawrence River. By 1818 there were 60 vessels on Lake Ontario; by 1824, 150; and the value of exports was \$380,000 in 1818; \$500,000 in 1822.⁵ Thus Lake Ontario commerce played an integral part in the development of international trade and the boom in American commerce after 1815.

The five million acres that comprised the Genesee Country of western New York were cleared for settlement by 1790 after disputes between New York State and Massachusetts, and Indian claims to the land, had been successfully negotiated. In turn, the states sold their holdings to private investors who divided the land into tracts for sale

(continued on page 8)

Fragments of History

Sometimes fragments of history are too few to lend themselves to interpretation, but many, such as this letter hand written by furrier John Jacob Astor, shed light on the lives and business dealings of the pioneers of the Genesee Country. (Italicized words are not very readable or are editorial comments. The letter is in the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library).

Balltown Springs 15 July 1798

Gentlemen

I ric your *post* of yesterday _____ and observe that you had not than agreed with *malice*. For my part I must confess I think but little of his Beare Skins he asked me 2/as first I _____ very bade I did offer him 24/ for 20 the best 6/ for the Cub what he asked 216 but for the Deer Skins I will take tham or 16/ for pr pice for his Beare Skins all _____ und & 6/ for the Cubs, mean time as they are poor _____ I care little about them.. Your Musrat skins are too High for me I have bought in Albany at 2/ as good as yours if you will take 3/ for yours I will take tham & than thy will be much higher than myself these years past as many of tham are very thin of furr and not so good as good fall skins if you can decide *decide* to let me have tham I would wish tham soon as in case a quantity should arrive in N.Yh which I do esspect will arrive Musrat will be no more than 2/ in N York.

You'd take care I pick up all the good Beare Skins you can for me and have those I bought of you with the Elke Skins beat out before you have tham _____ (hung?) up as also the Furrs _____ martin Minks and others

I am gentlemen

Your Huble Svt (*humble servant*)

John Jacob Astor

(name is underlined and a curly

line also runs underneath)

John Jacob Astor

15th July 798

Rid _____

Mr Abram Tomlinson

Merchant

Schenectady

(A round seal held the letter folded in half with the address on the back page).

Baltimore Spring 15, 1798

Gentlemen

I like your list of yesterday & am
and advise that you had not then agreed
with the assessor for my lot I must confess
I think but little of his value since
he asks me 20¢ at first & then out of your
very grace he said after his 24¢ price of the
best ~~and~~ ~~was~~ ~~asking~~ to do with the
rest of the pair, for my lot I think them
very high never the less if he will
take 24¢ for 20 the 1st lot 4¢ for the cub what
he ~~has~~ ~~asked~~ 2 1/2¢ for the 5th skin
I will take them or 16¢ for his
Beaver skins all round & 6¢ for the cub
mean time as they are a pair for a
pair of cub little about them
Several skins are too high for me

I have bought in Albany at 2/ as good as yours
If you will take 2/8 for yours I will
take them & then they will be much higher
than any I had these 2 years past
as many of them are very thin of fur
and not so good as good full skin
If you would be so kind to let me have them I
would wish to have them soon as in
the case a quantity of ~~and~~ ~~are~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~case~~
I do expect will arrive in about 2 weeks
no more than 4 in New York

Kind take care to pick up all the
good Bear skins you can find
and have them brought to you with
the Elk skins. Let not be for you
have them packed up as above to
my Mother, Uncle & other friends
Please send the letter to Mr. Abram ~~the~~ ~~Post~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~Post~~ ~~office~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~Post~~ ~~office~~

to individuals. "Massachusetts encouraged proprietors to promise a rational, commercially oriented development . . . rather than piecemeal settlement."⁶

Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham of Massachusetts bought that state's entire tract of six million acres east of the Genesee River. In addition, they induced the Seneca Indians to part with another 2,500,000 acres, plus the Mill Yard Tract, a narrow strip of land of the Genesee River, twelve miles wide and twenty-four miles long that ran from the edge of Lake Ontario (Charlotte) to the present site of Rochester.⁷

George C. Latta's family came to the Genesee Country in the 1790's. His father, James, and oldest brother, Samuel, quickly became part of the emerging pioneer community, the father as a merchant, Samuel as a surveyor and drover. They were well acquainted with the Genesee Country, its land owners and agents (Oliver Phelps and Charles Williamson), its settlers, and most importantly, the opportunities the wilderness offered for the expansion of personal wealth.

Canandaigua in 1790 was the forward base of operations for the land speculators of the Genesee Country, and home for its most notable agent, Oliver Phelps. Population was sparse and scattered but the possibilities for expanding one's fortunes were as close as the latest land survey. Friendships, business partnerships, and marriages were built around that shared opportunity. While it would be impossible to ascribe motives for the individual pattern of immigration, it would appear that once in the wilderness, the commercial nature of frontier settlement and development was impossible to ignore. Land became the primary pioneer commodity. George Clinton Latta's family was intimately involved with the process of frontier investment and the men who controlled its momentum.

Those who were adventurous enough to settle on the primitive land were well aware of the economic possibilities the new country offered. Many, like James and Samuel Latta, had become familiar with the area through their associations with land agents and speculators, working as surveyors and drovers. Benjamin Barton Jr. accompanied his father often to the Genesee Country from New Jersey delivering cattle to the British Garrison at Niagara so that by the end of the Revolution, both men had developed close ties with the Seneca Indians, and both were educated to the advantages of land ownership and the area's potential commercial opportunities.

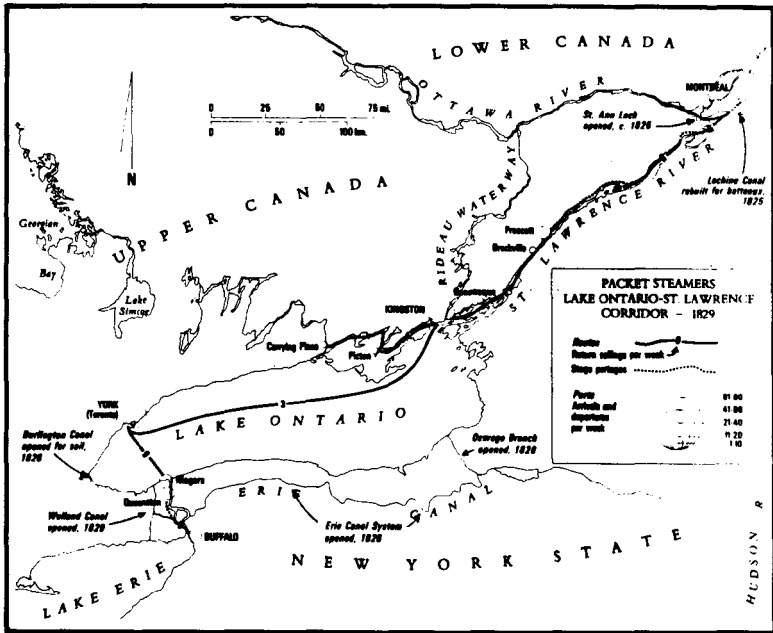
The political influences the Bartons had access to are evident in their land transaction. When the deed to Benjamin Barton Jr.'s one hundred

acre farm in Geneva (bought in 1788 at 17 years of age) was legally questioned, it was Governor DeWitt Clinton who interceded on his behalf in 1794.⁸ In addition, a 1796 entry in Captain Charles Williamson's daybook (agent for the Pulteney Estate) records that Nathaniel Norton and Benjamin Barton were both credited with the annual salaries of \$400 (probably for survey work), for three consecutive years, in payment for Lot #34 in Galen Township at a cost of \$2400. Benjamin Barton, Jr. was also sheriff of Ontario County from 1801 to 1805, during which time he was responsible for foreclosing on 100,000 acres of land in the Morris Reserve (part of the Forty-Thousand Acre Tract, now Allegheny County).⁹

Among the Barton's many other land dealings were: the purchase in 1792 of Ebenezer (Indian) Allen's mill on the Genesee River (sold a year later to Samuel Ogden because of disrepair and lack of customers); membership in the Niagara Genesee Land Co. (with John Butler), one of the two joint lessee companies that attempted to buy all of the land west of the pre-emption line out from under the state of New York; and the purchase of choice lots with Augustus and Peter Porter and Joseph Annin (brother-in-law of Benjamin Barton, Sr.) at state auction in 1805 within the mile strip of land from Black Rock to Lewiston (Barton, Sr. had, prior to auction, surveyed the land for the state of New York).

In addition to the land Barton and his associates bought from the state, they accepted a lease which offered them the exclusive right, for thirteen years, to transport goods across the portage at Lewiston. Eventually the Porter, Barton & Co. monopoly owned and managed several vessels which operated on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, in addition to being suppliers for the military posts along the Great Lakes as far as Mackinaw, Chicago, and Fort Wayne. It has been claimed that one of their regular clients was John Jacob Astor whose wealth was built on the fur trade. By 1805 Barton was a partner with Annin and the Porters in Lewiston where, in 1806, they began their carrying trade in association with Matthew McNair of Oswego and Jonathan Walton Co. of Schenectady, becoming the first connected line forwarders in the Genesee region. The wife Benjamin Barton, Jr. brought with him to Lewiston was George Latta's sister, Agnes, whom he had married on November 11, 1792 in Geneva, New York.

The foundation of George Latta's success as a merchant and forwarder lay in the business networks sought out and cultivated by his family. James Latta, George's father, came to America from Northern Ireland in 1772 (where it is said, he owned a fleet of sailing vessels that cruised between New York City and Liverpool, England). He married



Sarah Jackson in New York City on February 27, 1773 and moved to New Windsor, New York, where he bought a farm and opened a dry goods business. By 1789 the family was in Geneva where oldest son, Samuel, had purchased 1200 acres of land for \$2.50 an acre from Oliver Phelps, and where, by 1791, Samuel was listed as Canandaigua town officer. Here Samuel Latta became the active coordinator of family affairs.

As early as 1796, as agent and surveyor for the Pulteney Estate, he bought land at the mouth of the Genesee River for \$175. There he built a warehouse, and was subsequently appointed Customs Collector of the Port of Genesee by President Thomas Jefferson in 1806. In that same year, Samuel had surveyed Latta Road (for access from the Genesee River to Braddocks Bay) and built a home at the corner of what is now Broadway and Latta Roads. The extent of Samuel Latta's status in the community can be measured by the fact that, by 1809, he was listed as one of the ten freeholders in the town of Gates.

George's mother, Sarah, died in 1807 and his father, James, moved the younger children to Lewiston in 1809, purchasing a farm three miles west of the village. There George Latta attended school and worked on the farm. By the summer of 1810, George owned a team of oxen with which he earned ten dollars for two months work for his uncle, Benjamin Barton. The team was probably one of the many used for port-

age of goods taken from Lake Ontario ships to the warehouse of Porter, Barton, & Co. at Schlosser or Lewiston. His pay, incidentally, was not in cash but redeemable in merchandise from Joshua Fairbank's dry goods store.

In the meantime, a small settlement at the mouth of the Genesee had grown to a village, encouraged by the expanding commerce of the lake and river trade. By 1811, George, who was now sixteen, had returned to Charlotte to live with his brother, Samuel. As an antidote to a month long struggle to overcome the Genesee ague, Samuel sent George along on a cargo voyage in November, 1811 to Kingston and Ogdensburg in Upper Canada, on Porter Barton & Co.'s schooner *Ontario*. He was given the necessary sea stores and money by his brother and put under the care of the captain. The voyage took about three weeks and on the return trip he wrote that he had come to:

Within ten or fifteen miles of the Genesee River, when we met a heavy wind from the westward and were compelled to run back and put in at Presque Isle Harbor. We were at this time rather short of provisions and the next morning the captain, Oliver Culver, Frederick Bushnell, Samuel Sheldon, other passengers and myself went on shore in pursuit of provisions and called at the house of the widow Sellick to get some bread, but could not get any, as she was out of flour. She said she had sent a grist to mill, and if we would wait until they returned she would let us have some. Some of the party discovered she had a loaf at the fire baking. They purchased of Mrs. Sellick, or she gave us half the loaf and we purchased some turnips and went on board. At evening the wind came around fair and the captain, feeling anxious to get out, as the ice began to make in the bay, we got under way again for Genesee River and the next morning we made the land off the docks.¹⁰

The experience not only benefited George's health, he had made the business connections that would secure his first job. By January of 1811, George C. Latta was apprenticed to Frederick Bushnell and James K. Guernsey of Charlotte in their dry goods business where he worked from 1811 to 1821, receiving fifty dollars annual salary until 1816, then \$200 against his room and board from 1816 to 1821. The War of 1812 temporarily ended commercial activities at the Charlotte Harbor and the business moved first to Victor then to Lima, and George went with it, though he did serve in the militia briefly in the winter of 1814 in Hardscrabble near Lewiston. The interruption of the war and the

resulting unstable economic conditions may be one reason for his unusually long apprenticeship.

A notice in the *Rochester Telegraph* February 27, 1821 announced that George C. Latta had become a partner with his former employers, Guernsey & Bushnell Co., (and with V. R. Hawkins who had been managing their retail operations in Gaines) in their storage, forwarding and mercantile business at the corner of Latta Road and River Street in Charlotte. It is possible that George Latta's inclusion as a partner was due to the company's need for additional cash caused by the depressed wheat prices in Montreal in 1821 and the anticipated negative impact on their business when the Erie Canal reached Rochester by 1822.

At Guernsey & Bushnell Co. the frontier products of ashes, shingles, barrel staves, wheat, flour, whiskey, port and the like were purchased from the Genesee Country settlers and sold to forwarders in various port cities of Canada from Kingston to Montreal. In turn, some Canadian forwarders (who were also merchants) supplied Guernsey & Bushnell Co. with manufactured goods. In the spring of the same year, the company established its own ashery in association with James Currier, one mile west of the Genesee River on Latta Road, bought the stock of goods from the Gaines store, and built an ashery there in association with James Mather.

Early lake commerce was governed largely by the capacity of existing marine technology. The favorite cargo ship of small carriers up to the invention of the steam vessels was the schooner, of about fifty tons burden, favored for its speed which allowed for a rapid turnover of cargo, and because it had a "greater hardiness and surety in working narrow channels and confined waters." There were no standards in designs, materials, or paint, each shipwright adding his own creative alterations to suit the schooner's purpose. This included the lake innovation in rigging in which the raffee topsails were worked by an arrangement of tracks and clew lines from the deck.

Even the best docking facilities consisted only of a crude pier supported on trestles, or cribs filled with stone. . . Such a dock was useless when a strong wind was blowing and waves were running high. The small schooners. . . required no great depth of water anyway. The steamer's course had to be governed by frequently "heaving the lead" for in those days no charts, light houses or other aids existed for navigation. Until compass courses and running time could be worked out, it was necessary to exercise extreme caution.¹¹

The harbor at Charlotte had its "pilot tree," a giant elm, as a navigational aid until a stone lighthouse was commissioned on the west bank of the Genesee River in 1821. Improvements in the channel in 1829 and 1838 plus the addition of stone piers on both sides of the river eventually allowed access to the largest lake vessels.

Over the years 1821 to 1835 George Latta, with his business associates, owned and operated a fleet of schooners, including the *General Brown*, *Julia*, *Guernsey*, *Cleveland*, *Mary Jane*, *Swallow* and the packet, *Charlotte*. The improvement in port facilities, the Erie Canal, the imminent arrival of the railroad and the efficiency of the steam vessels heralded the demise of the sailing fleet for cargo. By 1835, George Latta had divested himself of his schooners, though an 1856 ledger reveals he had five shares of stock in the steamboat *Coburg*, owned by an American/Canadian syndicate whose operations were probably coordinated by Toronto entrepreneur Donald Bethune.

The Canadian connection is an excellent example of the importance of networking operations to nineteenth century entrepreneurs. It was a relatively small group of men, through "their own personal interests and ambitions . . . not from any nascent nationalistic spirit" that dynamically transformed the economy in eastern Canada, especially Montreal.¹²

*In all the new ventures being established during the period from the late thirties to the early fifties, a segment of the Montreal business community demonstrated impressive talent for mobilizing the capital resources of the community. Yet their interest was, with few exceptions, limited merely to endeavors that would enhance the commercial power and extend the metropolitan reach of Montreal.*¹³

They accomplished this by actively petitioning the provincial government for extended transportation routes (canals, railroads) in order to control the trade of the entire mid-western region of the Great Lakes, funneling as much as possible through Montreal. As a group, these entrepreneurs were isolated, active in legal and illegal trade, knowledgeable about American business connections (many were Americans), stable sources of credit, and a reliable network of agents at various ports operating on their behalf. Prior to the completion of the Erie Canal, trade entering Montreal harbor was controlled by these men, especially Horatio Gates, founder of the Bank of Montreal, staple merchant, and forwarder dealing in pork, flour and potash from the Black River and the Genesee region. An 1820-1835 ledger indicates that Horatio Gates was one of Guernsey & Bushnell Co.'s largest customers, for in the years

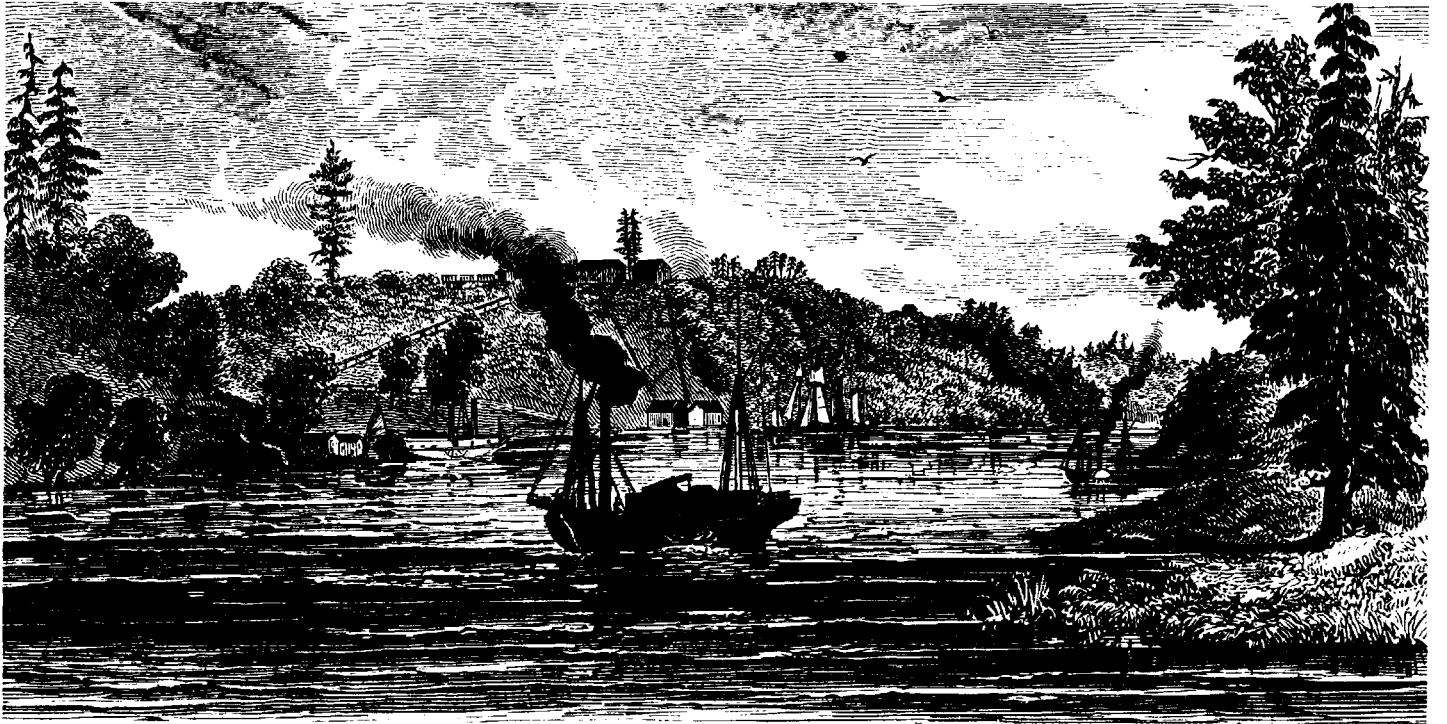
1821-1826, he bought pioneer products worth \$129,890.96.

The magnitude of Guernsey & Bushnell Co.'s trade with Canada is impossible to tally accurately because of incomplete records, but it was impressive. For instance, an 1827 memorandum from James Currin to Bushnell discusses the upcoming shipment of steers worth \$6,500 belonging to Mr. Herrick (of Herrick & Webb of Ogdenburg?). The average sale price is twelve pounds sterling for the West Indies and thirty-five pounds for Britain, amounting to \$10,036.35 in total sales. Guernsey & Bushnell Co. also bought four notes for Horatio Gates by Phillips & Currier on January 19, 1822 worth approximately 975 pounds. Among the other firms Latta did business with was the Hooker, Holton Co. (James Henderson and Luther Holton in Montreal, Francis Henderson and Alfred Hooker in Prescott) and Moulson, Davis Co. All of these men were from wealthy families and their forwarding business depended on a high degree of organization and capitalization as well as support from partners in a chain of American and Canadian ports. In the late 1830's just about the time George retreated from the forwarding business, the Canadian connection asserted its dominance over St. Lawrence shipping.

The forwarding business was the natural entrepreneurial activity to follow pioneer settlement. The crucial requirement was cash to buy the frontier products, to store them and to provide a ready market for their disposal. Business partnerships were easily established prior to 1850, for even though New York State had a general incorporation law in the late 1830's, partnerships remained the most common form of business organization. George Latta is a good example, for from 1821 to 1835 he changed partners four times.

In Charlotte in the 1820's and 1830's there were competing forwarders including some of the captains of the lake vessels like Captain John T. Trowbridge, but in no instance was the range of competition as large or complete as that with which Latta was associated. Most forwarders were brokers buying and selling frontier products, whereas Latta's operation encompassed the entire process, from raw to finished product, and from wholesale to retail sales. He and his associates owned asheries, warehouses, graineries and schooners, as well as a grocery, dry goods, mercantile business. The range of their business was impressive, a mini-monopoly of supplies and services in the wilderness.

A look at the names listed in the 1821-1835 Latta account book reveals a who's who of early Rochester society. Such prominent people as Jonathan Child, Director of the Bank of Rochester and first mayor of the city; attorney Abraham M. Schermerhorn, who served in several capacities (including president) on the board of the Bank of Rochester



The Port of Rochester as it was in 1838. Channel improvements and stone piers on both sides of the river allowed the largest steam vessels to enter.

and as city supervisor; Everard Peck, book printer and editor and publisher of the *Rochester Telegraph*; Elisha Ely, miller, surrogate court judge and trustee of Rochester Village, were all regular customers. In addition to the gentry there were such working folk as "Botanick" doctor Pontilles Bartholick, shoe shop foreman William Smith, whitesmith John Colby, carpenter Thomas Lee, attorney Ephraim Wheeler, and widow Polly Phillips. Besides individuals, public and private institutions such as the U.S. Hospital, the Poormaster, the Bank of Rochester, roads, post office and school committees, all had accounts with the company. So too did individuals from outlying areas such as Niagara, Potsdam, Morristown, Riga, Palmyra and Attica to name a few. In addition to being provenders for the lake vessels, they used other schooners to ship the goods in their forwarding business. An 1820-1832 ledger lists the accounts of thirty-one ships, including their own.

George Latta was a broker as well, acting on behalf of various Canadian and American buyers such as H. G. Williams Co., I. T. Taylor Co., Thomas Rochester and Henry Fitzhugh. Generally his commission was three percent; charges were added for storage and delivery. This part of the business mirrored that of his Canadian counterparts, for example; a chain of American forwarders on Lake Ontario which included Porter, Barton & Co. in Lewiston, and Cole & Wright in Oswego. Porter, Barton & Co. were early customers, shipping 367 barrels of ashes in the spring of 1823 (the ashes were a by-product of the settlement of the last frontier in western New York) through Guernsey & Bushnell Co. for storage and sale. Not the least of their entrepreneurial activity included income from the store in Gaines where sales were as high as \$21,955.22 for one month in 1822.

Simultaneous with the involvement in Guernsey & Bushnell Co. each partner had his separate transactions. By 1831 the other partners eased out of the partnership, leaving George Latta the sole owner of the business. However, it was not long before Latta was associated with Henry Benton (former cashier of the Farmers and Mechanics Bank in Rochester) and in 1832 with Frederick Bushnell. Eventually, Latta worked as an individual broker, a wholesaler, buying and selling an enormous range of products from both the Genesee Country and Canada, and a retailer whose store inventory in the 1860's and 1870's resembled nothing short of a modern day department store.

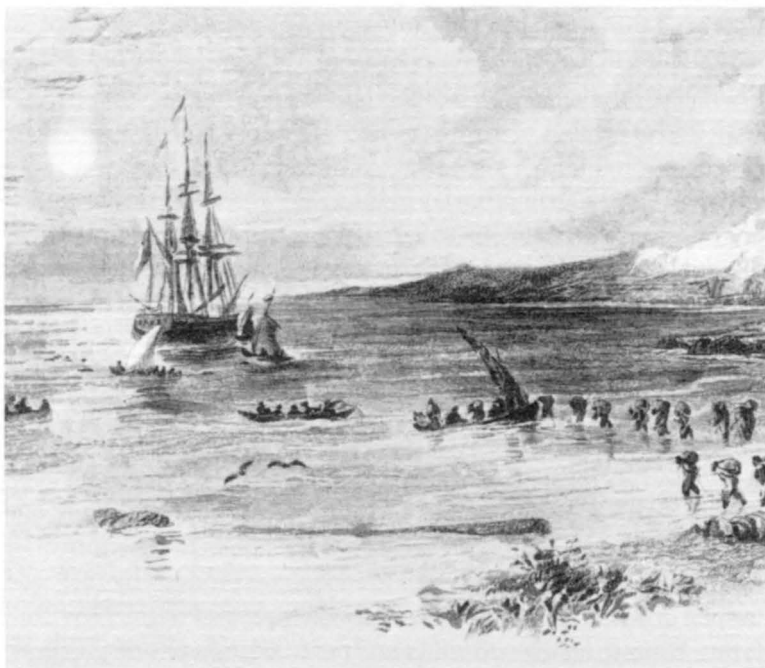
The thoroughness of Latta's entrepreneurship is evident in the range of his investments. For instance, over the span of his business life, 1821 to 1868, Latta owned several farms. The agricultural products those farms produced were part of his commercial enterprises, both forwarding and mercantile.

In the 1848 *Inventory*, the "48 acres of wheat on the ground" (worth \$384) and thirty-two head of cattle represent potential profit, not family staples. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the hides of his slaughtered cattle were cured at his tannery and made into shoes that were sold at his shoe store in Brockport, operated and later owned by his nephew John.

Part of Latta's farm property in the 1850's was converted to a nursery business where stock was carefully chosen to appeal to both individual and commercial needs. It was well known that the Genesee Valley was an ecologically ideal site for apple and peach orchards. An English visitor to Rochester in the 1840s found "The markets . . . well supplied with animal and vegetable provender in the greatest abundance and the apples of Rochester are without exception the finest I had ever seen in my various travels throughout the kingdoms of Europe." It is not surprising then to find in Latta's 1857 nursery stock notebook a list of forty varieties of apples. Included were ornamental, fruit, and nut trees, but not nearly in the same quantity as apples. New York State led the nation in the value of orchard and garden products by 1859, and in spite of the competition from western wheat and cattle, New York farms, because of diversification and modified agricultural practices, remained competitive and economically healthy through 1870. A large part of that success was due to technical innovations, fostered by entrepreneurs like George Latta.

Among the books in Latta's extensive library were not only the three leading agricultural journals (*The Cultivator*, *The American Agriculturist* and the *Genesee Farmer*), but the *U.S. Patent Office Reports* and the *Transactions of New York State*. As early as 1834, there was an entry in Latta's cash ledger for \$30.25 paid for an ash patent, and in 1860-61 correspondence with John Brooks of Michigan reveals Latta's interest in securing power of attorney to sell Brooks' farm machinery exclusively in Canada. By expanding his knowledge and awareness of the latest inventions, Latta increased his capacity to prejudge possible opportunities at the same time that he reduced the risk involved.

George Latta, the businessman, was part of the political, social and economic hub of Charlotte and was sought out often for his opinion and financial or business aid. While he was active politically, his impact on the community was through his creative efforts to maintain and encourage Charlotte's commercial viability. To that end he, with other businessmen, was responsible for initiating transportation improvements as well as establishing social institutions. Two very important elements indigenous to his paternalism, however, were his access to ready cash or credit, and his network of friends and business associates.



*John Jacob Astor's international trade took his ship **Beaver** to Peru in 1819 where it is being loaded offshore.*

George Latta's effectiveness was sustained over time by his mercantile dealings with such Genesee Country elites as Oliver Phelps and the Rochester and Fitzhugh families. These were friendships that were mutually initiated by economic need, especially in the early years. For instance, the cash requirement necessary to purchase wheat for Latta's forwarding business in the harvest months of August and September was enormous. An 1834 account book shows that Henry Fitzhugh acted as a bank or money broker, paying Latta as much as \$4,900 in cash for wheat in the month of August, 1834. Such liquidity allowed Latta a great deal of flexibility in his wheat buying. No transaction was too small, for Latta paid from 71¢ to \$123.80 to individuals for their wheat. The wheat profits were in sharp contrast to the average of \$35 a week received for goods sold in his retail store. Deposits in the Bank of Rochester were equally impressive; for example, \$2,500 on September 30, 1834.

Probably the largest source of capital after Latta's retail and wholesale business, was his considerable land holding. Between 1822 and 1872, George bought 23 lots in Greece, 12 in Charlotte, three in Brockport and one in Rochester. In addition, an 1856 personal inventory lists

179 acres in Cass County, Michigan, worth \$1690 and 74 acres in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, worth \$1480 (site of present city of Cleveland on Lake Erie). Western land speculation in Ohio and Michigan was a common indulgence among the Genesee Country entrepreneurs. Many moved on to those western lands, including some Latta relatives with whom George maintained a correspondence regarding his land's development, settlement, and appreciation. From nephew Alfred Latta of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

*. . . I have no way of judging the value of your land. . . father Hill sold a farm well located near Lansing of 150 acres for 1100 dollars, all good dry land. I think wildland has depreciated some since the passage of the homestead bill, while improved land has come up. . .*¹⁴

Through real estate broker S. J. Brown, Latta eventually divested himself of his western land.

Latta became a money lender himself, with \$15,388.17 worth of bonds and mortgages and \$23,695 worth of real estate in 1848; and \$53,820 in real estate and \$14,350.82 in bonds and mortgages in 1856. These two categories represent the bulk of the total value of his entire estate (\$48,580.77 in 1848; \$79,531.48 in 1856). However, those figures represent the ideal. Often debts were difficult to collect and the legal route to recover debts owed was expensive. William Alcott exemplifies the difficulty in recovering debts. On May 11, 1847 Alcott wrote Latta:

I am not one of them that thinks for a moment that because you have an abundance of land, that my obligations are any the less binding to pay you.

Alcott was in the forwarding business in Boston (probably supported by some of George Latta's money) and did accept wheat from him for resale. A visit to Boston by Latta's nephew in 1847 did not produce the \$487.31 Alcott owed, and it is doubtful Latta was ever paid, either for his loan or his wheat, for two years later Alcott states:

*I have recently been put in a position where I am earning a little more than a living. . . but still I am in debt for my family expenses this year.*¹⁵

In the 1840s there was widespread business activity, but by the 1850's, due to the impact of the railroad, the patterns of lake trade were changing. On November 11, 1857 (a year of severe economic recession) Latta wrote to Joseph Fellows:

These are the hardest times we ever experienced in this country. . . (I) have a large amount due but cannot at present collect (He asks Fellows to raise \$500 to \$1000 loan for a year). I have never before been short of money and should not be now if I could collect a small portion of the money due me . . . but (this) cannot be realized at this time without making cost and a great deal of trouble to the person owing me which I would be sorry to do if I can possibly avoid it.¹⁶

Land remained for George Latta the most stable of investments, even if it was difficult to exchange it at times for cash.

The broad range of Latta's investments (mercantile, forwarding, manufacturing, farming, and nursery) required protection in the form of insurance. Levi Ward, Jr., another prominent Rochesterian, represented several insurance companies, including some of local origins, and was the underwriter of many of George Latta's enterprises, including the insurance on the value of goods shipped to Canada in his schooners. The network of professional relationships was indispensable to the continued success of Latta's business interests, and by implication to the village of Charlotte.

But significant business connections alone would not insure success for the port at the mouth of the Genesee, for Rochester and the rival up-river town of Carthage were drawing money and business away. Charlotte was by-passed by the dominance of the city of Rochester and by the horse railroad to Carthage on the east side of the river. Realizing that improved transportation networks were the key to increased settlement and subsequent commercial growth, Frederick Bushnell, George Latta, Giles H. Holden, and Henry Benton petitioned the New York State Legislature as early as 1832 for a railroad. The petition was sent to the Assembly Committee on railroads but by 1832 the "remonstrance of Oliver Strong and others, against incorporation of the Rochester & Charlotte Railroads" successfully defeated the measure. In 1835 the proposal passed the Assembly but was defeated in the Senate and it was not until 1852 that contracts were let to begin construction on the railroad.

Since passage of a bill permitting construction of the Charlotte Railroad was deferred, George Latta, with another group of businessmen

from Rochester and Charlotte, organized and built the Rochester-Charlotte Plank Road in 1849. The road was six rods wide and ran from McCracken Street (now Driving Park Ave.) to Latta Road and the docks, a distance of eight miles. Capital stock was \$10,000 and George Latta with \$4,000 invested was the company's largest stock holder (he earned \$390.80 on his investment in 1853). Tolls collected for the year 1852 totaled an impressive \$7663.68. The road was said to be the best paying stock for the amount of capital invested of any. . . in Rochester.¹⁷ Latta's property on either side of the plank road increased in value and the Latta nursery, begun in 1850, was probably located adjacent to the road on what is now Lake Avenue, at the site of the present cemeteries.

Initially the nursery was called the Charlotte Plank Road Nursery. A hotel was built by "part of the same gentlemen who built the road" at its terminus, and when it failed as a business, George Latta bought the "Lake House" as his family home. It is not surprising that there would be an attempt made to encourage the tourist trade, for Latta had learned, as had Canadian entrepreneurs, that after the advent of the Erie Canal and lake steamers, the predominate freight on the lakes had been passengers, particularly tourists eager to see Niagara Falls. Recreation and tourism were becoming potential entrepreneurial activity.

Soon the success of the plank road was supplemented by the addition of the Rochester-Charlotte Railroad. When ground was broken on August 25, 1852 for the initial phase of the Charlotte/Rochester Railroad the *Rochester Daily American* reported:

little Miss Charlotte. . . styled on Wall St. begins to get ready for company. . . She talks of piers, wharves. . . the shipping interests and other marine matters with infinite gusto and evidently takes great airs from the fact New York is only an instance of what a small but well located seaport may become in process of time.

By Friday morning May 12, 1853 the *Rochester Daily Democrat* reported that the first run was made from Rochester to Charlotte in thirty minutes, the arrival of the train "something of a surprise to the citizens of the village; but the event was hailed as one of no small importance to their interests." The advantages, of course, went beyond passenger travel convenience for. . . "with a direct and speedy communication with Canadian ports (freight and) passengers can be taken from Charlotte to New York in 12 hours and from Canandaigua ports in 24 to 30 hours." An observation was made that property value along the route increased one hundred percent, with George Latta again the beneficiary. After a period of dormancy, the new transportation routes

transformed Charlotte into what its investors hoped it would become, the hub of maritime commercial activity. By 1856 there were luxurious steamers at her docks, the grain elevators were filled with Canadian wheat to be milled, and numerous vessels were arriving and departing daily with goods in trade.

A growing community, in order to be attractive to prospective settlers must provide social institutions. While this was not the greatest of George Latta's investment concerns, he nevertheless participated in their development. In 1833 a lot 41 by 33 feet (on the SW corner of what is now Stutson St.) was donated by George Latta for a brick schoolhouse. The meager size of the lot barely afforded room for the school much less such a luxury as a privy. In winter:

it took time to get warm when the cracks in the floor were large and numerous. . . Jack frost held a mortgage on the toes which he was loath to release.¹⁸

Eventually Latta sold to the school district for \$400 the triangle of land at River Street and Broadway for another school in 1863.

The Methodist Society of Charlotte, of which George Latta was a trustee, at its earliest organization held their meetings in the brick schoolhouse (about 1848). Later, George was a trustee also of the First Presbyterian Society (as were William Rankin and Joshua Eaton, fellow stockholders in the Rochester-Charlotte Plank Road Co.) and was instrumental in building a church on land sold to the Society by the widow of Samuel Latta (one quarter acre on the west side of Broadway for \$125).

George Latta was married to Frances Mann in 1839 (he was 44 years old). The James Mann and John Moxon families had come to the United States together from London, England in 1823, and by 1826 the Manns had moved to Rochester where they bought and operated the Commercial Hotel. Frances and George Latta had ten children born between 1840 and 1859.

The extended family included that of Samuel's widow; John A. Latta (George's nephew), and the Benjamin Barton family in Lewiston. As with business associates, George was called on often by family members to rescue them financially or to make outright gifts of money. A poem from a "poor cousin" (F. A. Barton) in Lewiston on December 30, 1836 ended in this postscript:

*And now, I hope you will be willing
For Christmas sake (unclear words) to send a shilling,
Unless I am such nuisance found
That you would rather give 'the pound'.¹⁹*

By far the greatest support he was asked to give was to his nephew John Latta who lost very heavily in wheat speculation, probably in the late 1830s. An R.G. Dun & Co. credit report in 1867 states that "years back (John) was one of the heaviest grain speculators . . . and was considered worth \$200,000 but failed badly."²⁰ Through the management of George Latta's tannery, shoe factory and store in Brockport, John was able to regain his fortunes substantially but it took several decades. By 1872 John Latta's credit was rated good. George probably did not give his nephew anything but the opportunity to reverse his financial ruin.

Lending money was not the only attention George Latta was asked to give to the Barton family. He was also extensively involved in collecting outstanding debts or selling land that Benjamin Barton owned in the Rochester area, as well as settling accounts for the Benjamin Barton estate after Barton's death. In the negotiations that ensued, George Latta was the beneficiary of land and money. It may have been the long drawn-out settlement of the Benjamin Barton estate (12 years) that prompted Latta to include in his own will the proviso that five years after he was deceased all his furniture and property was to be unencumbered. He provided for his wife an annual income of \$300, three parcels of land, plus use of the house and the wood necessary to heat it.

Judging from the contents described in the *Inventories*, the Latta home was well provisioned to meet the upper middle class standards of the day, comfortable but not opulent. The china cupboard contained everything from breakfast dishes (including egg cups) to fruit dishes; but there were few furnishings that could be considered frivolous. For instance, the walkway between the corn house and the barn doubled as a bowling alley (probably bocce), but it was obviously an addition that could be justified as serving a double and useful purpose.

There were the tragedies to bear as well. Latta's six-year-old son, John William, slipped and fell into the Genesee River while playing on the wharf with two companions in 1862. Attempts to rescue him failed in the spring freshet and the body was recovered two weeks later.

The financial instability of Latta's oldest son, George Jr., caused Latta to add a codicil to his will leaving George Jr.'s share to his wife, Gertrude, and her two minor children, Mary G. and George B. Latta.

While in charge of the mercantile operation in Charlotte, George Jr. had no assets "aside from his father" and there is evidence to suggest

that before George Latta Sr. died on November 26, 1871, he had assigned the business back to his father. George Jr. died just four years after his father in 1875. Though Latta's wife, Frances, and others tried to manage the business after George's death, their success was limited and by 1883 there was no longer a George C. Latta Bros. business.

Latta as the frontier merchant was indeed the "agent of everybody" from small farmer to Canadian forwarder. The abundance of open frontier land did offer many opportunities for development to challenge an entrepreneur. Because of Latta's family background, it could almost have been predicted that his business career would include both mercantile and shipping operations. The difference he made was in the extent of his business, for the frontier was an entirely new experience. He demonstrated his creativity in constantly modifying his commercial enterprises to adjust to the tremendous changes taking place, especially in transportation and technology, and in keeping abreast of the latest inventions or laws that would or could affect his business.

The value of his family alliances with men of influence and capital was indisputable because these were the closest to the sources of power, both economic and political. The existence of a family network with men of capital alone would not, however, make an entrepreneur. George Latta encompassed, then extended, that network in a variety of ways: through continued participation in the militia, through his business dealings, and by his involvement in politics, community improvement and social organizations.

George Latta's consistent success over time was dependent on his prudent practical personality. He avoided waste and dependence upon middlemen. The products of George Latta's farms and nurseries were sold through his forwarding and mercantile business, and he used their by-products to create another business; namely he used the hides of his slaughtered cattle to make shoes and other leather products. Finally, he was his own shipper and wholesaler for the manufactured goods sold in his retail business. That was true independence and another example of his conscious reduction of risk.

George Latta's entrepreneurial activities did have an impact on the social, political and economic affairs of Charlotte. His financial success was due in large part to his capacity to anticipate and encourage developments. He accomplished this by maintaining close association with those in power and by his capacity to take calculated risks on his own behalf and that of his community, Charlotte.

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Briggs & Bro's encouraged home gardening and devoted several pages of their 1872 catalogue to planting and harvesting instructions.

The Cultivation of Flower City

by Dan Parks

Well before Rochester became a flower city, it was widely known as the flour city. It produced some of the finest quality wheat and flour until the wheat fields moved too far west for the Rochester mills and intermittent pest infestation during the 1840's and 1850's sent the milling industry into a steep decline. Horticulture was still in its infancy when the milling industry began its decline.

The weather was well-suited for horticulture because Lake Ontario radiated cold air in the Spring delaying the early plantings that could be damaged by frost; and in the Fall the heat radiating from the Lake extended the growing season. The canal was important too. Before the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, the journey between Buffalo and New York City took 20 days; but equally important, the freight charges were \$100 a ton. The canal shortened the journey to six days and the freight charges were reduced to \$5 a ton. This reduction in freight costs was certainly a boon to horticulture, but the Erie Canal also gave the Rochester nurserymen a five to eight day lead over the older nurseries in Albany and Long Island. In a business where the quality of a product was not only dependent on a short transportation time, but essential to any sort of long-lasting success, five to eight days was important to the establishment of the industry.

Although seedsmen and nurserymen were already present in the Genesee Country when the mills began their decline, most businessmen thought the country was too far north to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers commercially. So the Genesee pioneer chose to grow wheat and little else, buying whatever staples a household might need from

DON'T FAIL TO SEE IT!!!

1845

1874.



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Seedsmen and Florists.

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OUR SPRING CATALOGUE of Flower and Vegetable Seeds, Bulbs and Plants for 1874, richly illustrated with several Colored Plates and Four Hundred Engravings, will be out about December 1st. The most complete Catalogue and Guide to flower and vegetable culture extant. We challenge comparison on prices and size of packets and quality of Seed. Sent to any address for 25 cents.

SEE ENDORSEMENTS OF THE PRESS EVERYWHERE.

DAILY DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE BOOK PRINT; JAMES LENNON, ELECTROTYPHER, ROCHESTER, N. Y.

the sale of the wheat crop. "Kitchen" gardening was certainly a part of the pioneering experience, though gardeners grew, for the most part, only those vegetables that could be stored for several months: potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, and beetroots. During the 1830's, for example, tomatoes were grown by only a few curious individuals. And only after the manufacture of sealable glass jars, shortly after the Civil War, did women start to grow more perishable goods to store.

But there were some entrepreneurs who knew there was money to be made if the market could be developed and these men made horticulture the dominant industry of the Rochester area: nurserymen like Naaman Goodsell, Asa Rowe, George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry; and seedsmen like James Vick, C. F. Crosman and Joseph Harris.

Naaman Goodsell, the first editor of the *Genesee Farmer*, pioneered the effort to smash what he called the stubborn devotion to wheat. He visited the William Prince Nursery in Flushing, New York, in November 1831 to learn how a successful nursery was operated, and whether such a business could succeed in Rochester. He was so impressed with the Prince Nursery, that shortly after his return he wrote a laudatory account of his visit in the *Genesee Farmer*.¹ In January of 1832, a scant two months after this article appeared, Goodsell began the first garden nursery on Buffalo Street in Rochester. In March of that year, he was joined by two former agents from the Prince Nursery, whom Goodsell had earlier persuaded to come to Rochester with tales of a moderate climate, fertile soil, and the prospects of grand profits. Together they formed the Rochester Seed Store and started receiving orders for trees, shrubs, plants and seeds. They also started planting a five acre nursery garden from which they could sell their locally grown stock in order to release themselves from dependence on other nurseries.

A month after the establishment of the Rochester Seed Store, Naaman Goodsell began extolling the raising of garden seeds because of the rewards he felt would surely follow such an enterprise. He said, "the raising of garden seeds for market appears to be entirely overlooked by the farmers of western New York (and) . . . if proper attention were paid to it, few agricultural pursuits would afford a greater profit."²

While Goodsell was promoting new ways of perceiving the world, of exploiting nature for material and, ultimately, spiritual gain, he was at the same time engaged in a battle with the die-hard New England tradition of growing only certain crops like wheat and of exploiting the land until its fertility was exhausted. Moving further west to new lands, rather than rotating crops and properly manuring to replace lost fertility, was the only method of farming most settlers to the Genesee re-

gion ever knew or cared to know. It was this habit, this devotion to wheat, that Goodsell attempted to change.

He believed it was sinful and uncharitable not to exploit God's greatest gift, nature, in an independent and logical manner, and in a way that eschewed the tunnel-thinking that characterized the New England tradition he was attempting to undermine. For Goodsell, the fight was for a heightened spirituality as well as a greater material and scientific wealth. Though the means differed, one can characterize Goodsell's attitude toward young America much as Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the conquistador historian, characterized Cortes' journey through New Spain, "we came here to serve God, and also to get rich."³

The first commercially successful nursery (that developed its own seed stock) was Asa Rowe's Monroe Garden and Nursery, opened in 1833 and located in Greece, near Lexington Avenue. Rowe's "first" status was disputed by Electus Boardman, who, in 1842, said in an advertisement in the *Genesee Farmer* that his nursery was in continuous business in Rochester since 1822.⁴ No records were found that can prove this point one way or the other, though Asa Rowe was the first nurseryman in the area to have prepared a catalogue of the seeds and plants available at his nursery. Published in October, 1833 in an issue of the *Genesee Farmer*, his four-page catalogue listed over 70 varieties of apples, 70 varieties of pears, 50 of peaches, 55 of perennial plants and seeds, ornamental trees, grapevines and roses. Rowe's catalogue offered a great variety of each plant because the early nurserymen needed many strains from which to develop hardy stock. The selection of the hardiest and most productive variety depended on observation, a comparison with many varieties of the same plant, rather than with just a few.

Before horticulturists could develop their own supply of nursery stock, they purchased it from the older nurseries in the east. It took five to eight days to travel to Rochester from Albany or New York City via the canal. These products, if not properly packaged, were subject to moisture rot. In addition, labels were often inaccurate—at times deliberately so. The problems created by wrongful labeling and poor packaging were exacerbated by the many peddlers who traveled along the Erie Canal selling seeds and nursery products that were of poor quality and all too frequently given to disease. Thus there was a need from the earliest days of horticulture in Rochester for locally grown, and properly classified, stock. Mislabeled was an ongoing problem and was never completely overcome in the nineteenth century, though Ellwanger and Barry proved to be the most diligent and successful in their attempts to properly classify the trees and bushes grown at their nursery.

By 1834 several other nurseries were started in Rochester. Luther

Tucker, then owner of the *Genesee Farmer*, advertised annual and perennial seeds for sale that he purchased from William Thorburn of Albany. G. H. Holden offered wheat seed, and shortly before October, William S. Reynolds and Michael Bateham started the Rochester Seed Store and Horticultural Repository at the former nursery site of Naaman Goodsell who attempted to start a rival agricultural journal called *Goodsell's Genesee Farmer*; but it failed.

Reynolds and Bateham planted a horticultural garden and erected a greenhouse, and in December of 1834, following the lead of Asa Rowe, published a catalogue in the *Genesee Farmer* advertising such varieties of seeds as beets, kale, brussel sprouts, celery and romaine lettuce.

The period, 1835 to 1840, was one of transition and disappointment for those selling seeds and nursery products. There was a peach blight, several severe winters, a summer of drought, a summer of flooding, a nation-wide depression, and a frost.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment of the late 1830's was the failure of sericulture (raising of silkworms) in the Genesee country. In the early 1830's it was widely believed by horticulturists that the raising of mulberry trees and silk worms would be the major agricultural pursuit in America during the coming years. Silkworm raising was to be a cottage industry, the very epitome of what a family could do given the proper division of agricultural labor. The *Genesee Farmer* hopped on this bandwagon almost immediately. Nearly every issue throughout the 1830's either editorialized about the merits of sericulture, or reprinted a similarly-directed article from the publication, *The Silk Culturist*, of Connecticut. One such reprint, in May of 1835, said that the value of silk consumed overseas exceeded by two million dollars the value of all the wheat, rye, oats, flaxseed, biscuit, potatoes and hops put together. The New York Legislature joined Congress in promoting sericulture.

There were also all manners of "overnight horticulturists" who peddled the seeds and cuttings of *Morus Multicaulis*, a type of mulberry tree from China that was considered to be the favorite food of the worms, as well as the most hardy of the mulberry trees. Several of the Rochester horticulturists were deceived by one of these seed peddlers from an eastern nursery purporting to sell the original *Morus Multicaulis*. Luther Tucker purchased a third of an ounce of multicaulis seed for \$30, but soon discovered the seed was worth no more than 20¢. Other nurserymen propagated other varieties of mulberry, including what they thought was *morus multicaulis*, though by the late 1830's many of these fields were either plowed under or their mulberry stock sold at bargain prices, a result of a general skepticism of the area farmer and the unadaptability of the mulberry tree to the Genesee country.

Although hurt by the multicaulis craze, horticulturists managed to prosper. By March of 1837 Asa Rowe had expanded his nursery to twenty acres. That same month James Houghton, a former seed peddler and recent English immigrant, was joined by a countryman to form the Kedie and Houghton Seed Store. A month later Samuel Moulson first advertised for sale fruit trees at his farm near North and Norton Streets.

In April, 1837 Reynolds and Bateham gave a consignment of flower seeds to the *Genesee Farmer*, prompting the first editorial in that paper directly suggesting "the propriety of a greater attention to the cultivation of flowers." A flower garden, so said the *Farmer*, also taught children industry, economy, neatness, prudence, a love of order, good taste, good principles, and a love of nature.⁵

Late in 1837 Reynolds and Bateham dissolved their partnership. Reynolds accepted the management of the Livingston Flower Mill in Penfield and Bateham took control of the seed store in the Reynold's Arcade. Their nursery on Sophia Street was put up for sale, though no buyer appeared, so they agreed to first lease, then eventually sell the nursery stock to George Ellwanger, their manager, in January of 1839. Michael Bateham, sensing that the Genesee country held more horticultural promise than had hitherto been developed, wrote to the *Genesee Farmer* in June, 1839 that horticulture was still only practiced by a "few solitary individuals," though he went on to say that a few nurseries were thriving, most notably that of Asa Rowe. Bateham realized the importance of having locally grown stock, so when he established a seed store and an agricultural supply shop, he made an arrangement with C. F. Crosman to raise seeds and to test their viability. Crosman had recently bought a farm on Monroe Avenue.

A few months after Bateham joined with Crosman, George Ellwanger joined with Thomas Rogers, a mulberry tree salesman from the East, and together they purchased Bateham's five acres of nursery stock, the plants and nursery equipment and leased the Sophia Street location for two years at \$150 a year. By 1840 Ellwanger had bought out Rogers and joined with Patrick Barry, a recent Irish immigrant and more experienced horticulturist than Rogers.

Together, Ellwanger and Barry started the Mount Hope Garden and Nurseries on a recently purchased tract of land just south of the city, where they had already begun expensive plantings of fruit, ornamental and shade trees and several varieties of shrubs and bushes. They soon completed a greenhouse, moved the equipment from the Sophia Street location to their new nursery, and began propagating, testing, and growing the highest quality nursery stock available in America.

In November of 1840, their first advertisement for the Mount Hope Garden and Nurseries appeared in the *Genesee Farmer*. In it Ellwanger and Barry proclaimed with evident self-confidence their intention of supplying the West and Canada with nursery stock whose labeling was accurate and whose constitution was adapted to weather's hardships. Whereas the plants grown in the Mohawk Valley and in New England were often weakened or destroyed by the severities of weather, stock grown near the tempering presence of Lake Ontario would be both healthy and hardy.

Ellwanger and Barry underwent many difficulties the first two years. A hailstorm in August of 1841 chopped up many of the young plants. The day after the hailstorm, a fire destroyed a portion of their greenhouse, nearly forcing the partners into bankruptcy. They averted such an end by taking to the road and peddling the plants that had not been damaged.

The early years of the Mount Hope Nurseries were also plagued by difficulties associated with bill collection. Despite these setbacks, however, Ellwanger and Barry soon became the leading wholesale and retail outlet in the city. As early as 1843 they had already attained a reputation for a careful selection of only the most hardy graftings, bulbs, and plants; for an accurate listing of their nursery stock, and for prompt delivery and proper packaging. Later that same year the partners published their first catalogue. It was 60 pages long, and offered 94 varieties of apples priced at 25¢ each; 29 varieties of pears at 50¢ each; and 9 varieties of apricots at 37½¢ each. By the end of 1843 the Mount Hope Nursery had expanded to 43 acres. In 1844 Ellwanger and Barry opened a branch of their nursery in Toronto, in association with the seedsman George Leslie and they sold wholesale to such older nurserymen as Asa Rowe, Michael Bateham, Electus Boardman, and even William Prince and Sons.

Meanwhile, Luther Tucker, owner of the *Genesee Farmer*, decided to move to Albany in 1840 after having purchased *The Cultivator*, an agricultural publication formerly owned by Jesse Buel, an early leader of horticulture in America who died in 1839. Tucker eventually merged the two papers. Despite this merger, he expected to retain his readership in the Genesee country. Upon learning that Bateham, E. F. Marshall, and John J. Thomas started the *New Genesee Farmer* back in Rochester, Tucker issued a broadside denouncing the publication as a treacherous deed. But the incident eventually blew over, and the *New Genesee Farmer* started as a monthly publication, continuing successfully under several owners until 1865.

Bateham considered the influence of an agricultural publication in-

dispensable to the success of his business, and, indeed, to the success of all agriculture and horticulture in the area. The *New Genesee Farmer* continued closely the tone set forth by Tucker in serving as a medium through which agricultural theories and knowledge could be exchanged by the editors with the readership. As before, readers could write to the *Farmer* relating their own experiences on the farm. The topics, for example, centered on practical farming: worms in the heads of sheep, capacities of the stomachs of serpents, weeds, pruning, proper soil management, and the preservation of food.

The early 1840's saw several other important developments. Young orchards were starting to produce indigenous varieties of apples, supplanting the older, foreign varieties. The Swaar and Spitzenburgh, for example, were claimed to be superior to European varieties. Bateham was now advertising that he would pay cash for peach and plum stones, a move that attested to the increased demand for fruit trees. Asa Rowe's nursery was still flourishing, and Rawson Harmon was selling the much-touted Rohan seed potatoes from his farm in Wheatland for \$2 a bushel. Many others were still advertising mulberry trees for sale: J. C. Brainerd in Gates, Zerah Burr in Perinton, and L. W. Sibley in the city. In addition, Theodore Backus was selling silk worm eggs at his residence at High and Spring Streets. Apparently there was still a slight demand for mulberry trees, but as for a thriving and viable silk industry in Rochester, there never was one.

Michael Bateham said in an editorial in the *Genesee Farmer*: "few individuals could be found—those with enough wealth, taste, disposition, and time—to embellish their residences with ornamental trees and flowers."⁶ Gardens dedicated to purely ornamental plants were rare in early America and were usually limited to the upper classes. The wealthier residents of Rochester cultivated flower gardens, but for the average laborer in 1839, who might have earned only \$1.50 a day, a mulberry tree priced at 50¢ or a chrysanthemum at \$1.50 were unaffordable luxuries. It was not until the latter half of the century that a greater number of households, the emerging middle class, could afford ornamental plants. And it was not until this time that scientists dispensed with the notion that indoor plants produced noxious gases.

By October 1841 C. F. Crosman and Michael Bateham had severed their partnership. Crosman continued to study seeds at his farm on Monroe Avenue while Bateham published the *New Genesee Farmer*. Two years later, however, Bateham, because of ill health, sold his seed store to Crosman, and the *Farmer* to E. Shepard and Crosman. Bateham subsequently set off from Rochester to travel around the country observing the conditions of farmers. He eventually settled in

Columbus, Ohio, where he founded the agricultural publication, *The Ohio Cultivator*, and started another nursery, in association with Ellwanger and Barry.

Josiah Bissell and Horace Hooker purchased the fifteen acre nursery of Electus Boardman on Main Street (East Avenue near Goodman Street) for \$8000, establishing in 1844 the Rochester Commercial Nursery. By this time, Samuel Moulson's Old Rochester Nursery at North and Norton Streets was flourishing and in 1845 he reflected this success by opening a seed store on Front Street, a location that, by the late 1840's, was home to several seed firms. Also by 1844, William King had opened his nursery doors on Mount Hope, adjacent to the nursery of Ellwanger and Barry. So, by the mid 1840's, a flower city had started to bud. By the late 1840's the forests were no longer imposing and the horticulturists not as inexperienced. But the main reason for the success of the flower industry was the partnership of George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry.

George Ellwanger was born in December of 1818 on a small farm in Gross-Heppach in Wurtemberg, Germany. His father was a vineyardist. In 1830, he apprenticed himself to the leading nurseryman in Stuttgart where he worked for four years, from sunup to sundown; and for this privilege he was obliged to pay one hundred Gulden (about \$40).

Arriving in America in June 1835 he set off for Ohio to spend time with relatives and to acquaint himself with the English language. He traveled along the Erie Canal and later wrote:

"In passing through Rochester a halt was made to unload some freight, which gave me an opportunity to inspect the then infant city on the Genesee whose appearance impressed me strongly, especially its luxuriant vegetation and its favorable location for horticultural establishment. The Erie Canal, moreover, made it a highway to the west."

Ellwanger returned to Rochester that fall, and by the spring of 1836 had assumed charge of Bateham's Rochester Seed Store and Horticultural Repository.

Patrick Barry, born in 1816, spent his childhood and early adulthood in Ireland where he attended school until age eighteen, and afterwards worked as a teacher. He arrived in New York City in May 1836 and soon secured a job as a clerk with the William Prince Nursery in Flushing, then the leading nursery in America. In 1840 he moved to Rochester after hearing about the horticultural opportunities available in that expanding town. Shortly after arriving, he and Ellwanger met,

and started what was to become a life-long friendship and business partnership.

Of the two partners, Patrick Barry is the more knowable. Viewed through his writings, and most notably his editorship (1844–1852) of the newly created horticultural department of the *Genesee Farmer*, we see a man geared toward the promotion of a scientific, commercial pomology (fruit raising). Barry's first article, "Horticulture in Western New York," published by the New York State Agricultural Society in 1842, criticized the judges at the State Agricultural Fair of 1842 for refusing to award fruit prizes because of incomplete labeling and less than perfect appearance. The next year, however, when the State Fair came to Rochester, there were fruit, floral, cattle and grain prizes. "Every man," said Barry, "who aids in introducing a new and valuable fruit, is in some degree at least a benefactor of his race."⁸

Bucking the reservations voiced by skeptical farmers who remembered the mulberry craze, Barry stated in 1845 that the demand for fruit would increase as fast or faster than the supply for years to come. Fine quality Northern Spy apples were being grown on several area farms and he and Ellwanger were losing little time in propagating and planting an increased amount of their own stock of Spy trees. This "craze," as some farmers chose to call it in their letters to the *Genesee Farmer*, did not surpass the strength of sericulture's departure, but certainly did in its productive arrival, as the Northern Spy is still, today, one of the more important varieties of apples grown by orchardists.

Besides the appearance of the Northern Spy apple and the call by Patrick Barry for a patriotic adornment of area residences, several other developments in the 1840's and 1850's illustrate how people were becoming increasingly sensitive to horticultural beauty and possibility.

In 1847 Ellwanger and Barry presented fifty shade trees to the city for planting in the Mount Hope Cemetery, a gesture that not only indicates how attitudes towards death were changing, but also one that made the cemetery a part of the domain of the horticulturists. No longer were cemeteries the victims of gross neglect; they had become places to be beautified, places in which to stroll and revere the long and dear departed. Death, though now concealed beneath the flowers and trees, had been transformed into a vision of health, cleanliness, youth and color. The cemetery was now a park to be publicly enjoyed by everyone. Barry said that both places, the nursery and the cemetery, could be visited conveniently in an afternoon's time. What was more important, however, was that the cemetery had been brought into the universe of the horticulturists where it could be coupled with the drive towards a model community and the spirit of free enterprise.

Rochester streets, too, became fit subjects for horticultural embellishment. A traveler to Rochester in the 1840's said that "the streets are tastefully adorned with rows of forest trees; around the dwellings as a general thing the little gardens and dooryards are tastefully filled with shrubs and plants."⁹

Another development was the increasing popularity of the strawberry. Catching on only slowly at first in the 1840's, the strawberry became immensely popular as an 1850's plant for the garden as well as a commercial crop for a new generation of farmers. Nearly every nursery's advertisement in the *Genesee Farmer* during these years listed the many varieties of strawberries then available. Among these were several developed by Zerah Burr of Perinton, one of the leading researchers in this area during the mid-19th century.

The import of this new-found love of strawberries was that people were feeling more comfortable with a fruit that had been perceived, for many years, as having no economic or useful function. Hitherto, the strawberry had nothing to do with wheat, and for this reason was considered a whimsical fancy. By 1853, however, area farmers discovered, said Patrick Barry, that people would pay "cheerfully liberal prices for strawberries, and the growers themselves reaped a rich harvest."¹⁰ Though the season was short, about a month long, and the strawberry itself not a staple crop, it was discovered that even pleasure could have its rewards.

In January 1846, the Genesee Seed Store opened its doors at 10 Front Street. A scant year later, it had an extensive network of agents acting on its behalf, from New York City to Detroit. Also in January 1846, the *Genesee Farmer* reported that C. F. Crosman was producing several thousand dollars worth of seed at his farm on Monroe Avenue. Though the seed business was still in its infancy, the gentle stirrings of its growth can be detected amidst the louder clamor of the parent nurseries.

Part of the success of the Rochester nurseries was due to the influence of Ellwanger and Barry. In turn, part of Ellwanger's and Barry's success was due to their frequent trips to Europe. In December 1844 George Ellwanger traveled to Germany, England and France, collecting bud-dings, graftings, and knowledge from several nurseries. Patrick Barry journeyed to Europe during the late winter and early spring of 1849 to collect the rarer species of plants and to observe the horticultural practices of the Europeans. Barry was especially impressed by several nurseries around Rouen, France. In an article for the *Genesee Farmer* following his return, Barry lauded the French for their meticulous cultivation of fruit trees and for their attention to gardening. "From the prince to the humblest peasant we find the garden the object of the

greatest solicitude (in France)."¹¹

Ellwanger and Barry derived much of their world view from the European, especially French, horticulturists during these years, though Patrick Barry was careful to note that the Mount Hope Nurseries and Gardens were unsurpassed by any nursery in Europe in terms of the extensiveness and maturity of plantings. Still, France and the rest of Europe were important influences on Ellwanger and Barry, and it was through them that overseas advances in horticulture were sifted and redistributed to the readers of the *Genesee Farmer* and to the visitors to the Mount Hope Nurseries. For example, shortly after George Ellwanger's return from Europe in the winter of 1845, the Mount Hope Nurseries introduced America to dwarf fruit trees, suggesting to orchardists that they replace their older, larger, and woodier trees, with smaller, more productive ones. And shortly after Barry returned from France, he began writing his soon-to-be widely read, and much acclaimed book, *The Fruit Garden* (1851). In it Barry explained and illustrated the physiology of fruit trees, and the propagation, transplanting, pruning, and training of orchard and garden trees. *The Fruit Garden* was reprinted over twenty times.

It is difficult to measure the scope of the Rochester nurseries by the early 1850's, but in the number of awards and prizes given, the number of nurseries, and the amount of plants grown, a new phase of Rochester's already illustrious agricultural past was quickly emerging. At the 1849 State Fair, held in Syracuse, Ellwanger and Barry won seven awards, while C. F. Crosman, placed in the amateur, not the professional category, took six. J. P. Fogg, proprietor of the Rochester Seed Store, was awarded one. At the State Fair in 1851, held at Rochester and attended by crowds of over 100,000, Ellwanger and Barry exhibited over 100 varieties of pears and apples grown on their own trial grounds.

At the winter show of fruit held at Albany in 1852 Ellwanger and Barry exhibited what was called the greatest variety of winter pears ever shown in the United States. It is interesting to note that not only were Ellwanger and Barry the leading nurserymen of the day, but also were two of the leading orchardists. By the late 1870's they were recording sales upwards of \$4000 from the sale of fruit alone, a large sum at the time. With such visible success, the grounds of the Mount Hope Nurseries became a school for area farmers and other horticulturists, all of whom were more than impressed by Ellwanger and Barry's comparative methods of growing many varieties of fruit trees so that only the hardiest and most productive could be further propagated.

By the spring of 1855 the number of horticultural establishments had

increased appreciably. The New York State Census of 1855 listed 150 nurserymen from the vicinity of Rochester out of a total of 300 in the state. In 1858 there were 104 nurseries in New York State with 30 of these located in Monroe County. In 1865 the state census reported the sale of 247,776 fruit and nursery trees by Monroe County nurseries with the return of \$205,360. The *Genesee Farmer* stated in 1856 that more fruit trees were raised in New York state, most of which were raised in Monroe County, than in the rest of America. It was also asserted that over 1000 persons were employed in the nursery business in Rochester. In terms of acreage planted, by 1860 the combined total of Alonzo Frost and Company's Genesee Valley Nurseries 250 acres, Ellwanger and Barry's 500 acres and Samuel Moulson's Old Rochester Nursery's 350 acres was greater than the total for any other county in the state. In addition, four other nurseries had from fifty to one hundred acres each.

In the decades following the Civil War the wholesale end of the business had grown so large that most of the local nursery product was handled by middlemen; agents, salesmen or brokers. One broker, the Chase Brothers, reported the total value of their shipments in 1887 at half of a million dollars. The Chase Brothers owned the largest brokerage house in the nursery business and one of the largest nurseries in the Rochester area. Their farm, southeast of Rochester, consisted of over 200 acres and employed over 200 during the peak season. The Chase Brothers were also the first nursery to use canvassing to sell their nursery products. Their sales force in 1887 amounted to over 1200 agents who were spread from Nova Scotia to California.

If not by raw figures, then the extent of the Rochester nursery trade can be gauged by travel accounts and by the origin of some of the advertisements that appeared in the *Genesee Farmer*.

Many nurseries, both in the United States and France, regularly advertised in the *Genesee Farmer*, thereby attempting to garner some of the market share and prestige earned by, and accorded to, Rochester. In 1875 I. De Saint-Ange, who was general agent representing all nurseries in France, opened an office in Rochester at 65 Martin Street, claiming it was the only French agency in the United States that could "supply direct from France any choice variety of ornamental or fruit trees, vegetable or flower seeds."¹²

Travelers to this area in the nineteenth century were impressed by the extent of acreage devoted to horticulture. Robert Russell, a visitor from England, singled out Ellwanger and Barry for praise:

*I visited the Mount Hope Nurseries which are the largest, I believe, in the world, extending over 250 acres of ground. Here, one obtains some idea of the enormous number of trees that are annually planted in the northern states. America is a better fruit than grain country, and horticulture is usually a favorite pursuit among those who are engaged in agriculture. The firm of Berry and Company (sic) who own these nurseries, frequently supply orders for 100,000 apple trees to the western nurserymen, who retail them in the newly settled districts.*¹³

Another visitor to the city in 1876 called the Mount Hope Nurseries "the most complete nurseries on the American continent."¹⁴

Despite the fierce competition among smaller horticulturists, the Mount Hope Nursery was unrivaled in the completeness and quality of its selection of horticultural plants. By 1859 the original seven acre tract expanded to 400 acres with nearly one-third of this total devoted to the raising of pear trees, then the most popular fruit in America. Apples covered 105 acres, cherries another 25, plums filled 20; deciduous trees covered 50 acres; and about 20 acres were planted with gooseberries, raspberries, and blackberries. Over 500,000 evergreens were being grown, along with two acres of magnolias and over 5,000 Sequoia trees. In 1862 Barry wrote a *Catalogue Of Fruits* and it quickly became the authority for the names and characteristics of all fruits grown in America. In 1865 he was named the first president of the Fruit Growers Society of Western New York.

By the end of the Civil War both Ellwanger and Barry had built what were then two of the more sumptuous homes in the area. Trips to Europe were as much for pleasure as for business, and both men now had the time to branch out into other activities: Barry was a school commissioner and Ellwanger became a trustee for many local banks as well as consultant to many commercial ventures. The partners also helped to establish the first horse-car line (Rochester-Brighton Street Railroad) in 1863. For 5¢ a person could ride from Main and Exchange Streets to the Clarissa Street Bridge and out along Mount Hope Avenue to the cemetery and the Mount Hope Nurseries.

Until mid-century the nurserymen dominated the horticultural world in Rochester, selling trees, shrubs, flowers, and seeds. There were several seedhouses on Front Street; yet, not the clear distinction between a seedsman and a nurseryman that existed after the Civil War. C. F. Crosman had been experimenting with seeds since 1840, though at the New York State Fair in 1849 he was placed in the amateur and not the professional category. The study of seeds had not as yet assumed

the professional status of the nursery trade.

The relative obscurity of the seedsmen in Rochester changed during the late 1850's. As Americans moved westward, old cities grew larger and new ones were settled. Thus followed an increased demand for food and, of course, for seeds to grow this food. And with the coming of the railroad, vegetables and fruits could be shipped at a profit. By 1855 the *New York Tribune* was quoting retail prices on apples, pears, peaches, plums, blackberries, whortleberries and green corn, lettuce, beets, turnips, cabbage, tomatoes and peas. By 1859 orchard products were valued at around 20 million dollars, and market produce at 17 million, with about one-third of this combined amount produced in New York State, and much of this in and around Monroe County. By 1855 nearly half of a million barrels of apples were being grown in Monroe County, and the year before the peach crop was estimated at 120,000 bushels.

A rail network was an important precondition to the seed industry because it facilitated mail service, the seedsmen's lifeline to those potential customers outside of his immediate geographical area. With the means to send mail-order catalogues to most areas of the United States a much greater market could be reached. Catalogues became an especially popular way of conducting business after hand-colored plates were designed in the 1850's and chromolithographed plates in the 1870's. Men and women spent many a cold winter's night leafing through colorfully designed pages of flowers and vegetables dreaming of how their gardens would look in the coming year. Many seedhouses in Rochester employed engravers, designers, and illustrators for making each year's catalogue more elaborate than the last.

In the January 1856 *Genesee Farmer*, James Vick first advertised French vegetable and flower seeds because he "found it impossible to obtain in this country a good article of the finer sorts of seeds." This inability to find quality seeds originally led Vick to sell the *Genesee Farmer* to Joseph Harris in 1855 so he could devote his full time to developing his small seed garden on Union Street. By 1856 C. F. Crosman had been raising and testing his seed for nearly sixteen years, but Vick recommended in an editorial in *The Horticulturist* in 1854 that people interested in raising flower and vegetable plants should send as far away as 1000 miles for the best sorts of seeds. For whatever reasons he chose not to purchase from Crosman, it was not long before Vick developed his own, high-quality supply of seeds from plants that were grown from seeds he first imported from France.

James Vick was born in Portsmouth, England in 1818, a stone's throw from the boyhood home of Charles Dickens, with whom Vick

enjoyed a life-long friendship. Vick emigrated to America in 1833 with his father's family. Like many of the Rochester horticulturists of the nineteenth century, Vick was closely entwined with the publishing world. He first came to Rochester from New York City in 1837 as a printer, and shortly thereafter became associated with the *Genesee Farmer* as a writer and editor, and finally as owner and publisher during the period 1849–1855. After the death of Andrew Jackson Downing, the great landscape architect, Vick purchased *The Horticulturist* from Downing's estate and moved it to Rochester where he published it from 1853 to 1855 with Patrick Barry as editor.

Vick later edited and published *The Rural Annual and Horticultural Directory* from 1856 to 1857 when he sold it to Joseph Harris who continued it until 1867. Vick also edited *The Rural New Yorker* from 1857 to 1862. While Vick was publishing and writing he was also experimenting with seeds in his spare time. This sideline soon grew into a viable business venture and by 1866 Vick acquired some land on East Avenue, now Vick Park A and Vick Park B, and quickly developed this plot into one of the most famous seed gardens in the United States. Until 1870, he packed most of his seed in the attic of his home before moving to a four-story building at State and Market Streets.

The grand opening of his new headquarters was happily attended by many people, so many that hundreds had to be turned away at the door. The *Union and Advertiser* reported that "in the evening the crowd was fearful and the efforts of the police, who were detailed for that purpose, were tasked to their utmost to preserve order and to keep the stairs, halls and rooms from being choked up with a struggling mass of humanity."¹⁵

Vick's four sons, James Jr., Charles, Frank, and Edward, attended to the various affairs of the business. Edward supervised the storage of bulbs and seeds; Charles was in charge of the bindery; James Jr. was head of financial affairs; and Frank oversaw the packing room. James Vick's two brothers, Joseph and William, were in charge of the company's fifty acre seed farm in Greece.

By 1872 the Vick Seed Company was sending out more than 200,000 illustrated catalogues each year, and was advertising in 3,300 newspapers and in all of the American agricultural and horticultural journals. The advertising bill in December 1870 amounted to \$15,000. \$4650 was spent just for stamps.

Charles Crosman was born in Vermont in 1802. At the age of 16 he moved to a Shaker community at Mt. Lebanon, located in Columbia County, New York. Here he became interested in the seed business. In 1837 Crosman's seed business was still in its early growth period when

he died in 1865. His sons, Charles (born 1847) and George (born 1851), assumed control. Little evidence is available, but Crosman's widow, Mary, must have played a crucial part in the further development of the business since her sons were only 17 and 14 at the time of her husband's death. By 1880 Crosman Seeds was one of the largest seed houses in the world. At one time they owned two seed farms in Canada for growing peas, one in France for the European market, and over 1200 acres under cultivation in the Rochester area. Locally, the number of employees during peak season exceeded 150.

By the early 1870's the Rochester area was already recognized as the leading seed center of the United States, so it is somewhat surprising to learn that Harris did not start his seed trade until 1879. A short sketch of the man tells us why.

Joseph Harris, then 21, with his cousin James, arrived in the Rochester area in 1849 from Shropshire, England. Their purpose in coming was to scout the area for a suitable farm on which the Harris family could settle. Joseph Harris originally heard of the fertile land in the Genesee country from an agriculturist at the Rothamsted Experimental Station in England where he was studying agricultural science. Soon after arriving in Rochester, Harris rented a farm adjacent to the one on which he would eventually start Harris Seeds. He sent for his family and they emigrated to America in 1850, though Joseph's father, Henry, died six months after arriving.

Harris' name first comes to our attention in an article he wrote for the October 1850 *Genesee Farmer* concerning the chemistry and management of soil. This was the first of many articles by Harris in which he brought his agricultural knowledge to bear on a community of farmers he felt was ill-prepared to meet the growing complexities of farming, especially with regards to wheat culture, then in its final decline. His views, consisting of a good measure of self-confidence, brashness, erudition, and the hard-headed logic borne of youth, were met with the resistance as would seem natural given his status as a newcomer, and the boldness with which he pursued his goal of educating the farming community.

In his popular column, "Walks and Talks on the Farm," that appeared in the *Genesee Farmer* from 1856 to 1865, Harris once wrote,

I pity the man who has no love for agriculture or horticulture. There must be something radically wrong in his constitution. . . if he prefers to stand behind a counter and measure out dry goods or groceries, and thinks it more "respectable" than cultivating the soil, he either lacks the instincts of a gentleman, or is weak in the upper regions.¹⁶

In 1862 Harris married Sarah H. Mathews and a year later purchased for \$14,250 the 141 acre farm he previously rented from Julia Huntington. That same year he was elected to the Monroe County Agricultural Society. In 1867, when Cornell University was first established under the charter as a land-grant college, Harris was offered the chairmanship of the new Department of Agriculture, but he did not accept it.

Like James Vick before him, Harris first tinkered with seeds before setting out on a commercial venture. By 1879, however, Harris felt qualified. He sent out 30,000 free copies of his first seed catalogue. A year later he built his first seed house. By 1890 the mail order traffic was so heavy that a postal substation was established at the Moreton farm.

Harris devoted much of his acreage to propagating new varieties of plants through study and selection. He also raised purebred sheep and swine, and was especially interested in improving field seeds such as potatoes, carrots and mangels (a type of beet). Harris emphasized vegetables in his research and, compared to other seed houses, raised fewer varieties.

Since coming to America, Harris emphasized the importance of household gardens that could bring a semblance of self-sufficiency. On many of the farms that he visited Harris saw only one or two cash crops instead of a variety of plants. The result was that these farms had to rely on outside sources for many of their daily needs. So in 1883 Harris wrote *Gardening For Young and Old*, a book in which he urged cultivation of one's own seed that he felt was better adapted to area growing conditions. Harris also wrote two other books, known more for their common sense and avid learning than for their titles: *Talks on Manures* (1878) and *Harris of The Pig* (1870).

Harris died in 1892, and his son, Selah, then 25, took over. By the end of the 1890's the Harris Seed Farm had become one of the largest of its kind in America. They pioneered the testing of the germination percentages of seeds, and printed this information on their seed packets long before such information was required by law. By the turn of the century Harris also offered other items besides seeds: asparagus roots, strawberry plants, purebred Orpington chickens, settings for hatching, Peking ducks, and Bronze Turkeys. Shortly after the U.S. Department of Agriculture introduced the hybrid sweet corn, Golden Cross Bantam, in 1916, Harris Seeds developed one of their own, the North Star, which was first to be developed specifically for growing conditions in the northeast. The ability to develop their own strains of seeds was one of the main reasons for the success of Harris after World War I. Since the war had severed European supplies of seeds, any American firm that could not develop its own supply or adapt in other ways to the

changed conditions simply went out of business.

Selah Harris died in 1931 and his sister, Margaret, and then his son, Joe, assumed control of the company. By 1979 Harris Seeds was one of the oldest and largest family-owned seed companies in the United States. Ironically, though, in the centennial year of the founding of the Harris Seed Company, it was purchased by the Celanese Corporation.

Besides Harris, Crosman, and Vick there were many other important seedsmen of the nineteenth century in Rochester. The Briggs Brothers seed business was begun in 1849, failed in October 1897, but continued to act as a commission house until 1920 when the effects of the war finally forced it to close. Before their financial difficulties, the Briggs Brothers owned 65 acres of land near what was then the Float Bridge in Irondequoit. Much of the seed grown there was planted on their farm in Iowa. Charles Briggs, one of the partners, was elected mayor of Rochester in 1871.

William H. Reid started his seed business in 1872 on State Street, and, at its peak, his business employed more than 75 people handling orders from over 100,000 customers. W. J. Mandeville started in 1876, and in 1878 was joined by H. S. King. Together, they began the Mandeville-King Seed House on East Avenue which lasted into the 20th century. Hiram Sibley, who started out as a wool carder, machinist and iron founder, and who made a fortune as president of the Western Telegraph Company, started his seed business in 1878. He later built a nine-story building on East Avenue, and opened a five-story branch seedhouse in Chicago. Sibley Seed employed more than 500 people. Sibley also was one of the largest landowners in America: he owned a 40,000 acre farm in Cayuga County (Howland), as well as farms in England, Germany, and France.



A flower garden taught children industry, economy, neatness, prudence, a love of order, good taste, good principles, and a love of nature, said the Genesee Farmer.

Acting in response to market forces, Ellwanger and Barry subdivided their property on Cypress and Linden Streets into home lots and built small cottages that were to be sold to their employees, though many of them were leased instead. Oakland Park was laid out in the 1870's between South Avenue and Mount Hope; 118 homes were built at a cost of \$250,000. During the ensuing years other nurseries and seed firms followed the lead of Ellwanger and Barry, simply because it was more profitable to subdivide than to grow plants.

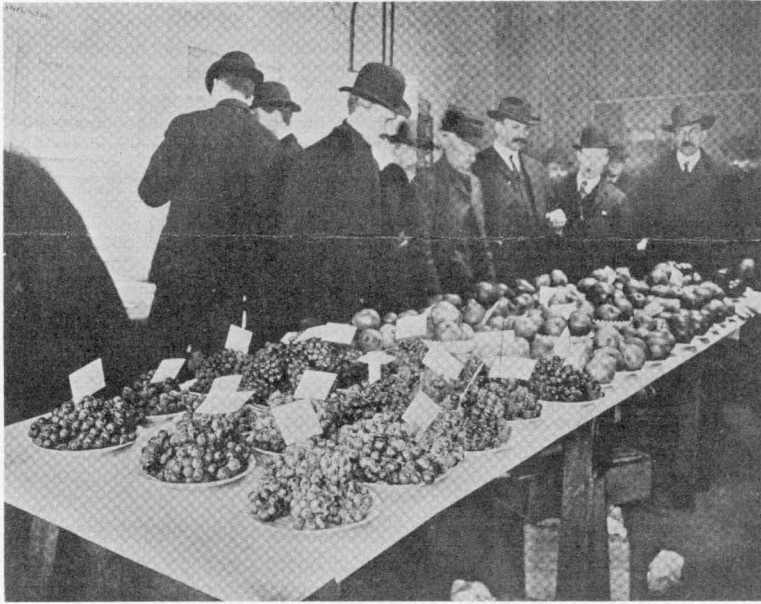
Once the western nurseries acquired their own reliable source of hardy plants the eastern nurseries were no longer needed. George Ellwanger, in a moment of pride, once said that the Mount Hope Nurseries had provided the original stock for every nursery in California. But once this market was filled, it could not be filled again.

The opening of new markets in Japan, Korea, and Australia did allow the Mount Hope Nurseries to carry many varieties of plants that other nurseries were forced to discontinue because of a lack of demand. By 1880 approximately 75 percent of the sales at the Mount Hope Nurseries were overseas. These markets started to close around the turn of the century. As for the seedhouses, several remained strong into the 20th century, though World War I forced many of those that could not develop their own supplies of seeds to close. Others were gobbled by larger companies, Vick was purchased by the Burpee Seed Co. in 1920; and Henry Mapstone bought out the Crosman family in 1925.

With the death of George Ellwanger in 1906, the final curtain was drawn. Henry Ellwanger, perhaps the only one of Ellwanger's four sons with the disposition to assume his father's place could not replace him. He died suddenly in 1883 at the age of 32, a year after publishing *The Rose*, a well-received and learned work on roses. George Ellwanger subsequently had a nervous breakdown, from which he never fully recovered.

Patrick Barry, too, knew about early and tragic death as three of his six sons and one of his two daughters, died from tuberculosis before any one of them reached adulthood. Though William Barry lived until 1916, he, too, suffered from tuberculosis, and, while convalescing in Saranac Lake during the winter of 1886-1887, he lost one of his children.

Perhaps the toll of all these deaths, especially those of Henry Ellwanger and Patrick Barry, was, in some intangible way, part of the impetus behind the Mount Hope Nurseries going public in 1900. Two thousand shares of stock were offered with a par value of \$100 and all were sold. By 1918 the company liquidated its stock at \$8 a share. Despite winning 649 prizes during the years 1900 to 1909, including the



Visitors inspected a variety of fruits displayed by Rochester and Monroe County horticulturists in 1906.

gold medal for an outstanding display of pears at the 1900 Paris exhibition, the Mount Hope Nurseries experienced a series of setbacks after its incorporation that only the gradual sale of its property could temporarily offset. But the greater loss was that prospective buyers looked elsewhere for their nursery products. After 1912, no new plantings were made, and the end of the company was in sight. Patrick Barry's son, William, the company's president, died in 1916; labor problems hit the company in 1917 and 1918; and by then the company was dissolved, after showing a slight profit for only two of the 18 years since going public.

The subdivision of land, the declining market, the deaths of the early horticulturists, and finally the availability of the products and information that these early entrepreneurs cultivated, all contributed to the decline of horticulture in the Rochester area.

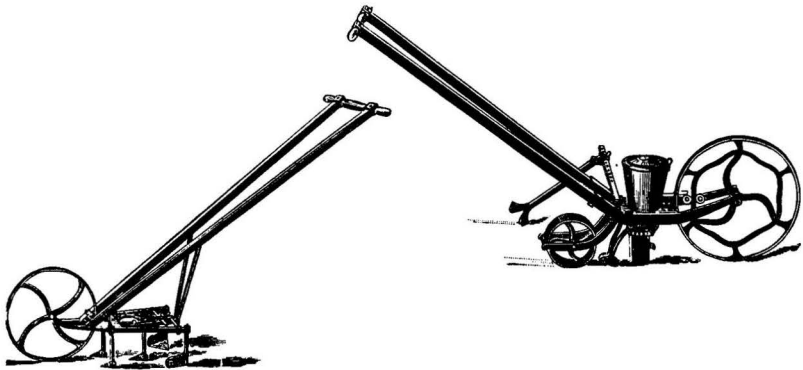
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Holbrook's "New Regulator" seed drill (right) dropped seeds uniformly and covered them while marking the next row. The "new" hand cultivator (left) did the work of ten men with hoes. Both were the latest equipment in 1870.

FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER

NO. 1,200 VOL. LVIII

NEW YORK FOR THE WEEK ENDING AUGUST 2, 1884.

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Many people in the 19th century were afraid that they could develop cholera through fresh fruits and vegetables if the water was contaminated. In many countries today it is possible to get cholera through any of the sources illustrated. (Credit: City Historian's Office; Strong Museum)