

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 15 Issue 1

Spring 2010

On The Tracks to Warrensburgh

by John T. Hastings

It was the summer of 1904 and rumors were flying about future railway traffic to the village. There was heavy competition between the Delaware and Hudson Railroad (D & H) and the Hudson Valley trolley. The two lines ran nearly parallel to each other from Albany to Lake George, and many began to ask: was the D & H about to take over the Hudson Valley trolley? And was the D & H ever going to build a branch from Thurman to Warrensburgh?

Then, the August 18 issue of the Warrensburgh News (the News) reported that "about twenty car loads with iron work for sections of the railroad bridge and trestle work needed to span the Hudson River," had arrived at Thurman Station. It became obvious that the D & H

planned to construct a spur line to Warrensburgh. The News also reported that the grading of the road-bed had been assigned to a Sandy Hill firm. Their tools were already at Thurman Station and work was expected to start very soon. The railroad bridge was to be located just below the existing iron bridge. Most of the right of way had been secured or was to be acquired through condemnation proceedings. It was expected that the railroad spur would be in operation "before snow flies this fall."

However, it was three months later before contracts were assigned for the construction of the railroad. These contracts stipulated that the contractors were under heavy money forfeiture to have the branch completed by July 3, 1905.

It is a worthy note that there were plans for the line from Thurman to Warrensburgh "to be extended to Lake George, thereby completing a circuit at Saratoga. Upon this loop, electric cars" were "to run and a special service to accommodate passengers, which would not interfere with the freight traffic by steam." Obviously these plans were never completed.

The first work to be done

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Factory Workers Program

by Steve Parisi

If I ever wondered how a gold prospector feels when he uncovers the mother lode, I believe I now know. The turnout for our Factory Workers "reunion" program on Sunday, January 24 was wonderful! There were more than 56 people in the standing-room-only crowd. Even more important, the event attracted people for which this was a first time at any Historical Society or museum event.

People in their eighties and even nineties braved the ice and an "iffy" weather forecast to tell their stories. Two-thirds of the people in the audience had either worked in one of Warrensburgh's mills or factories, or were related to someone who had. The hour-and-a-half program held the rapt attention of virtually all, and might have run on for another hour with yet more untold stories. (We hope to have another similar event soon.)

Abbie Davis Hastings, Charlotte Wood, both close to 100 years old, and "youngsters" Joyce Eddy, Betty Ovitt and Muriel LaPointe com-

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President's Column

Dear Members and Friends,

At our last monthly meeting Delbert Chambers resigned as President of the Warrensburgh Historical Society. Delbert, having served a year and three quarters of his term, assured us he will remain on the board and continue to support our efforts. We all thank him for his work as president and for his continued interest in the society.

Our Christmas Dinner held at Grace's was a big success. Attended by over 35 members it provided an opportunity to discuss society activities while getting us in the holiday mood. In January the Museum with the help of society membership hosted a Factory Workers program. Over 60 people attended to share their stories and reminiscences about their days working in the factories of Warrensburg. A DVD recording of this wonderful event is being edited and will become available. Dinner followed for those interested at Lizzie Keays, the former shirt factory. Our thanks go to Steve Parisi for pulling together this wonderful event.

Our annual meeting will be held February 24, 2010 at Grace's. Coffee and dessert will be served and Harold McKinney will be our guest speaker. He represents RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), an organization which matches volunteers with suitable venues with needs. On March 21st at 3PM a presentation about Covered Bridges by Jim Ligon will take place at the Warrensburg Senior Center, 3837 Main Street, Warrensburg.

Committees are beginning to meet for this year's Graveyard Walks and Scholarship Program. Suggestions and volunteers are always welcome.

And finally, John Hastings book *Around Warrensburg* is selling like hotcakes. Available at the Museum and several retail places in town it is a must have for lovers of Warrensburg history.

Hope to see you at our upcoming activities.

Rosemary

Society Page

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The Board of Directors meets at the Senior Center, 3847 Main Street, at 6:30 on the second Tuesday of each month. Call Rosemary to confirm at 623-4380.

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

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Upcoming Events

Annual Membership Meeting:

Wednesday, February 24, 2010,

7 PM, at Grace's

Covered Bridges Program with

Jim Ligon, Sunday March 21, 2010,

3 PM at Senior Center

Welcome New Members

Glynn Alexander Sharon LaGoy

Candace Terrell Crystal Grimaldi

Len Denner Joan Kelley-Ryder

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CURRENT MEMBERSHIP:

191

Membership Information

Students \$8.00 Individual \$12.00 Family \$25.00 Senior (62+) \$8.00
Contributing \$50.00 Business \$50.00 Institutional \$100.00 Life (Individual only)
\$250 (membership is on a calendar year basis)

If you would like to join and receive the Quarterly by mail, please send a check for the amount of the membership classification, with name, address, and phone number to: **Warrensburgh Historical Society, P.O. Box 441, Warrensburg, N.Y. 12885**

NOTICE

The recording of history is an interpretive and ever changing study. Therefore, the Warrensburgh Historical Society or its Board of Directors or members shall not be held liable for the accuracy or authenticity of the material herein. **We welcome and encourage corrections, comments, and additional information.**

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was construction of the abutments for the new bridge which would span the Hudson at Thurman Station. Henry Griffing surprised railroad engineers when he informed them of the need to riprap the abutments on both sides. Normally ripraping the upper side was necessary to protect the abutments from floating logs and ice coming down the river. However, in this case, during the heavy spring runoff a log jam usually developed at Gillingham flats located about three miles below Thurman Station. The reflex action of this jam would send logs and ice blocks back upstream with a force that would cause damage to the abutments.

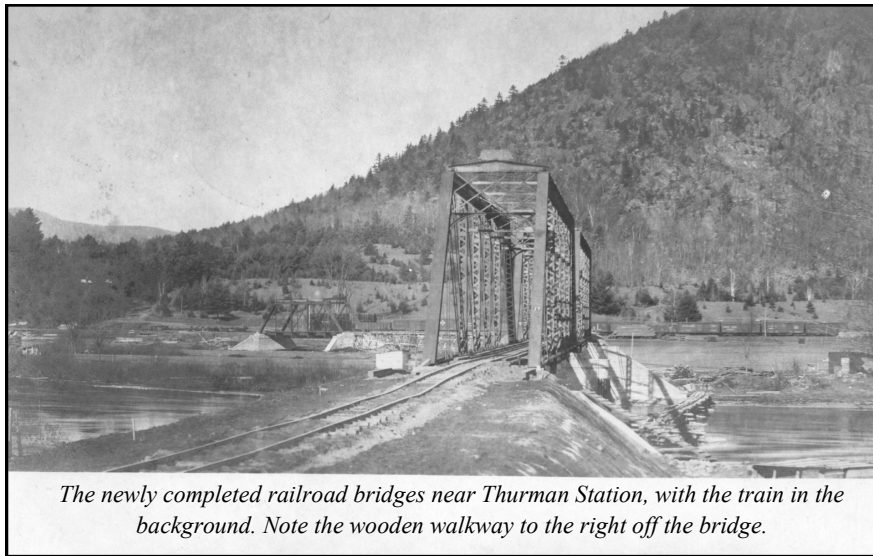
In March, 1905, the News reported that the contractors for the construction of the railroad spur were Charles A. Hart and John Conron of New Jersey. In actuality, the contract was awarded to P. Hart and Sons of Staten Island, of which Charles F. Hart was a junior member. The engineers for the project were J. C. Dorsey and W. E. Anderson of Albany. These engineers were responsible for settling with the various property owners along the right of way; paying claims and securing deeds for lands over which the road was to run.

The National Express office was temporarily moved from the Wills block into the Stackhouse Jewelry store on April 1, 1905. It was expected that James Young, the local agent, would be given new quarters at the D & H depot when it was built early in the construction.

By April 6, five carloads of tools had arrived at Thurman Sta-

tion and on April 11, a small steam shovel and two small locomotives arrived by way of the Hudson Valley Railway, coming from P. Hart & Sons in Staten Island. The following day, the locomotives were run off the platform cars on a temporary track in downtown Warrensburgh. After getting permission from Highway Commissioner Harrison to cross a reinforced Osborn Bridge, the locomotives were run under their own steam power to the operation site.

A large shanty was built on Alfred Stone's property in Lewisville for the Italian laborers and other buildings were planned along



The newly completed railroad bridges near Thurman Station, with the train in the background. Note the wooden walkway to the right off the bridge.

the route. However, it was still expected that the branch would be completed by July 3. It was April 13 when "an army of one hundred Italians were brought to their quarters between Thurman and this village" and were expected to start work in a day or two. Laborers were "floating into Warrensburgh from all parts of the county to secure work."

The May 25 Warrensburgh News reported that "a portable steam engine and concrete mixer arrived at Thurman Station on a flat car Tuesday and will be put in operation next week preparing the

concrete to be used in the construction of the piers for the railroad bridge across the Hudson at that point. It is expected that the piers will be completed and the bridge erected about July 15."

In early August, construction of the branch line was in high gear. "The Great Steam Shovel" was operating at the "big cut" in back of Deputy Sheriff Stone's residence in lower Lewisville and was a principal attraction of many visitors. It was called a "yard and a half shovel" since in one gulp it would take one and a half tons of earth. Two shovels full filled a dump car. The "Great Steam Shovel" weighed

45 tons. A smaller 33 ton shovel was expected to be put in operation later that week.

Next to the shovel were two dinkey (locomotive) engines (The name may have arisen from the insignificant size of the engine, or a corruption of the term "donkey"

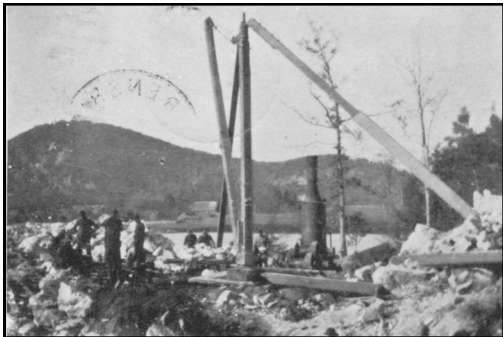
engine), named Vulcan and Dixon, which were used to move the earth to the "dumping grounds." Unloading these cars consisted of unhitching chains which then allowed the cars to swing free and be easily tipped by a workman.

Excavating and filling on a smaller scale was going on continuously at points along the line by one and two horse dumping carts. Grading was well under way from South Street, near the terminus, to the "stone cut" in back of Weaver's Pond. Five of seven culverts had been constructed using a large

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amount of concrete and stone. The stone for the concrete work was quarried near the base of Sugarloaf



Scene near the rock cut

Mountain on Henry Griffing's property and then run through a crusher.

Meanwhile the stone abutments for the bridge across the flats below Thurman Station had been built, and excavation had begun for the abutment on the west end of the bridge across the Hudson River. Cribs had been sunk out to the outer pier, and a coffer dam was ready to be filled. It was near this time that the spur track to the Schroon River Pulp and Paper company was started.

Along the route of the of the railroad branch, only two buildings had to be moved; John Clute's barn and Mrs. Sylvia Grogan's ice house. At the terminus of the route, two houses had to be moved to new foundations; John Hadlock's residence and a house owned by Wallace Baker.

By late October, the two bridges at Thurman Station were completed. But much work was left to be done. On October 21 track for the new branch had begun to be laid near the Schroon River Pulp and Paper Company. Ties were being strung and rails laid toward both ends of the line. A large cut near the Daggett place on the east side of the Hudson River needed to be opened, and fill between

the flood bridge and the main

track below Thurman Station, had to be placed.

As 1906 rolled around, the D & H railroad branch to Warrensburgh was nearing completion and was expected to begin operation within a couple weeks. Work left to do was ballasting the roadbed and the drawing of cinders from Saratoga to ballast the yard, which was to have seven switches.

On January 11, 1906 the News reported that the firm of P. J. Hart & Sons had completed their part of the construction and foreman Neil Hart and his men with all their tools, left today for Staten Island. The author wonders if the contractors suffered "heavy monetary forfeiture" since the completion of the construction occurred long after the July 3rd, 1905 deadline.

At its completion the Warrensburgh branch was a little over three miles long. The bulk of its business was carrying freight and providing an outlet for a large quantity of shirts, shirt waists, men's pants, paper and pulp, which before then had been drawn to Thurman by teams of horses. It would also bring in large quantities of grain, coal and lumber to the village. The line was abandoned in 1980 by the D & H Railroad.

Source: The Warrensburgh News



Newly laid track near Warrensburgh

(From the Warrensburgh News August 24, 1905)

Two men Seriously Injured On Railroad Job

Thomas Conway and Jerry Scully, of New York, employed by the Hart & Sons Company in construction of the Delaware & Hudson's extension of their railroad from Thurman to Warrensburgh, were seriously injured Monday morning by the premature explosion of a dynamite blast.

The men were blasting out a cut at the south end of Hoag's Pond, a mile this side of Thurman. They had placed the charge and were tamping it preparatory to discharge when for no apparent reason it went off, hurling Conway and Scully several feet into the air. The charge was an unusually small one since only a small quantity of rock was to be removed, otherwise the men would have been more seriously injured. The principal injuries were to the face and head from splinters from the tamping rod. Several of their fellow workmen witnessed the accident and went to their assistance. They were taken to the Charles Hoag residence where Dr. Griffin was summoned. Dr. Cunningham was sent for later to assist him.

Their faces and eyes were filled with splinters from the wooden tamping rod. Scully's wounds were the worst, requiring 40 stitches to close the wounds to his face. His eyes were also badly injured and many thought he would lose his eyesight. However, the next day Dr. Griffin reported that he could see his hand and would probably recover the full use of his eyes.

White, Yellow, Pink or Stinky Oleo?

by Sandi Parisi, Town Historian

While reading through an August 3, 1950 Warrensburg News, I came across the following article entitled *Colored Oleo*.

“State Agriculture Commissioner C. Chester Dumond cautions proprietors of eating places throughout New York state that the change in federal law does not make it possible for them to sell or serve colored oleomargarine under any circumstances. The head of the department says the statute does not permit the use of colored oleomargarine as a substitute for butter even for cooking purposes in public eating establishments or bakeries.

Restaurants can serve white oleo, but they must display conspicuous signs to that effect and also print a notice on the menu if they use menus. Colored oleo is strictly taboo in New York state. A penalty of \$25 is provided for each offense.”

That article screamed out to me to Google “oleo”. It’s amazing what you can find out!

I discovered that margarine was created in 1870 by a Frenchman, Hippolyte Mege-Mouriez (wonder if hippo and lite were factors?) for Emperor Louis Napoleon III who wanted a satisfactory substitute for butter. By 1878 laws requiring identification of margarine were passed in New York and Maryland as the dairy industry began to feel the impact of this rapidly growing product. In 1884 the New York State legislature prohibited the sale or manufacture of oleomargarine.

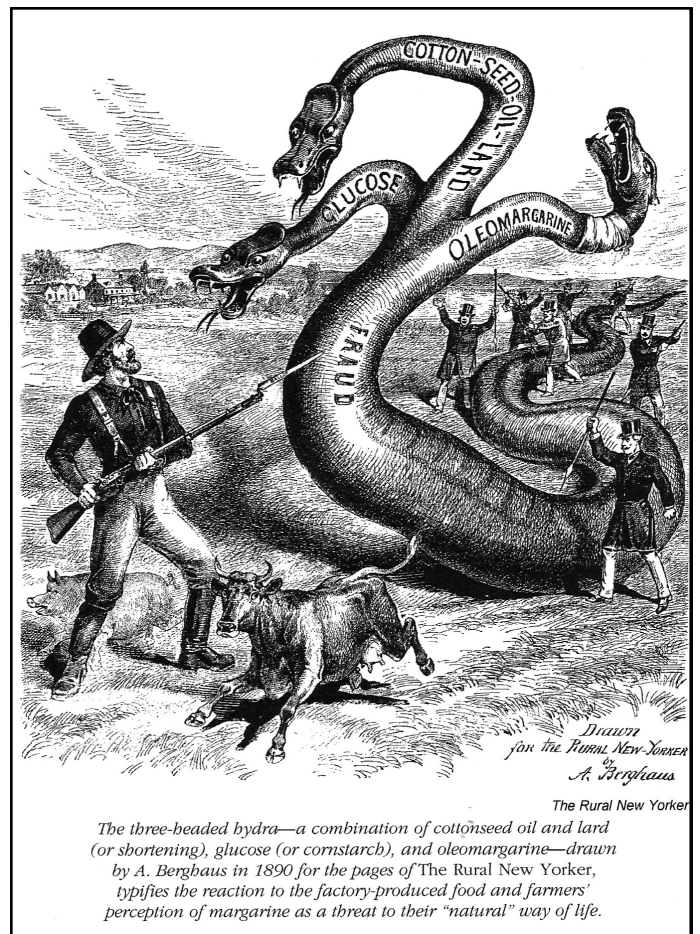
Then in 1886 Congress passed the “Margarine Act of 1866.” That imposed a tax of two cents per pound on margarine. Later that same year New York and New Jersey prohibited the manufacture and sale of yellow-colored margarine. By 1902 32 states lived under the margarine color bans. The Supreme Court did strike down the forced coloration (pink) which had begun in an effort to get around the ban on yellow coloring. Can you imagine smearing your croissant with pink margarine? There were even discussions of using blue, red, black, or impregnating it with an offensive smell.

1902 also saw purveyors providing capsules of yellow food coloring to be kneaded into the margarine. The practice continued through WWII, although butter required more ration points than margarine. We no longer had bootleg liquor, but yellow bootleg margarine.

In 1930 the Margarine Act was amended to place a Federal tax on naturally-colored (darkened with the use of palm oil) as well as artificially-colored margarine. Dairy interests prevailed and the butter and margarine prices were equalized. The consumption of margarine dropped almost in half. In 1932 the Army, Navy and other Federal agencies were barred from using margarine for other than cooking purposes.

In 1951 the Federal margarine tax system came to an end, state color bans, taxes, licenses and other restrictions began to fall. Finally in 1996 all restrictions were removed. And so today we can legally go to our grocery store and buy yellow margarine.

If anyone has any stories about squeezing those yellow capsules or packets, I would love to hear from you.



EARTHQUAKE REVISITED

Old evidence newly revealed

By Paul Gilchrist

During the course of gathering information for the elm and chestnut tree articles in this issue, the following story was revealed to your correspondent by descendants of people mentioned in it. Its scientific significance will be apparent to all who read in our last issue the account of the earthquake that struck Warrensburg on the afternoon of April 20, 1931.

On that day, Mrs. Ben (Ada) Guiles was preparing supper in her kitchen at the family's home a mile south of town and had a big skillet full of potatoes cooking on the stove. A busy mother of four children – Ben, Mary, June, and Charles – she was, of course, multi-tasking, which on this particular afternoon included the administration of discipline to her four young progeny, whom, having been guilty of disorderly conduct, she had sternly commanded to sit down around the table and be still. Harried, in some considerable discomfort from tooth extraction a couple of days earlier, and her attention distracted for a few minutes by all the childhood rowdiness and the need to restore law and order among the whirling dervishes, she didn't notice that the potatoes were burning until it was too late. The children, already skating on thin ice, were now guilty of being too still, sitting right there and not notifying their Mother that the potatoes were burning – a clear case of complicity in aiding and abetting the stove-top mishap! The very idea!

Mother Guiles became very upset, and the children could see that she was upset. An upset mother can be a fearsome thing; even so can an upset cook. And Ada Guiles was no exception. It could be a fearsome thing when Mother Guiles became upset. It could make four children tremble. The children, recognizing their guilty predicament, started to tremble and quake as Mother proceeded to let them know just how upset she was.

Now, it was 2:55 pm on April 20, 1931, when Mrs. Guiles discovered the potatoes had burned and she began, rather vehemently – nay, explosively (as it seemed to those present in recalling it years later) – to communicate her displeasure to her children. Strangely, that's the exact moment the record tells us the earthquake struck, starting with a sound like an explosion. Older residents of town could recall no previ-

ous earthquake that had ever started with a sound like an explosion. The scolding of the Guiles children went on for more than a minute, the same length of time that the record tells us the earthquake lasted; and when Ada Guiles' scolding of her children was finished, so was the earthquake.

All over town, dishes had rattled, chimneys had toppled, and walls had cracked, but no one *chez* Guiles was aware of any earthquake. It was only later that the Guiles family learned of it from others. One can think of two explanations for this: (1) With all the trembling that was going on in the Guiles kitchen, the four children were out-quaking the earthquake to such an extent that no one there noticed it; or (2) The explosiveness and timing of the scolding and of the earthquake corresponded so closely – both erupting and ending at the same moment - as to make one wonder whether the coincidence is just too great to be ascribed to chance. Four children trembling and shaking in concert, accompanied and conducted, produced and directed by an upset mother and cook, can create a great deal of turbulence. Is it possible - is it conceivable - there was actually no real earthquake, just the earth resounding, rebounding, recoiling, and quaking in high-amplitude harmonic response to Mrs. Guiles, her four children, and the burned potatoes (which, incidentally, they all ate for supper)? We leave the question for our readers to ponder and to draw their own conclusions. In either case, the Guiles house was proven to be of very sturdy construction, for it survived its epicentral experience undamaged.



Mrs. Ben (Ada) Guiles (Left) Epicenter of 1931 earthquake? High school faculty. Photo from 1938 "Blue and Gold" Yearbook.



Daughter June (Right), Linked to quake.? Junior class photo . Photo from 1938 "Blue and Gold" Yearbook



Daughter Mary (Farrar) survived both the earthquake and the scolding, and became high school librarian in the 1960s. Hackensack Yearbook, 1961.

Historic Elm Tree in Warrensburg!

by Paul Gilchrist

Articles about elm trees in our last two Quarterlies showed photos of three large surviving elms in Warrensburg. By far the largest is beside the driveway of Oscar's Smokehouse. It's over 100' tall with a girth of 16' 9," and was recently recognized as a National Historic Elm by the Elm Research Institute in Keene, NH. Professional foresters John Farrar and John Hastings certified it as an American Elm and provided other information that Jerry Quintal then submitted to the Institute. It's undoubtedly one of the largest American Elm trees in the northeastern U.S.

We noted that two disease-resistant elms were planted at the library last fall. Rumors have it that others will be planted soon at the cemetery and Senior Center. They are intended to begin restoring Warrensburg's heritage of stately elm trees. Oscar's elm sets an example to which the young ones can aspire.

Several elms are in the photo below, a reminder of the many that once lined the streets of Warrensburg. It was taken probably from the 2nd floor of the Music Hall, looking southerly towards the top of Elm Street. The flagpole (center) is in the same location as today. The historic fountain (lower right) now resides in a back yard on Hudson Street.



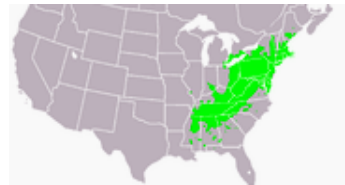
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While we're on the subject of devastated historic trees – here are notes on The American Chestnut Tree

The American Chestnut was historically a dominant tree in much of the eastern United States, estimated to have comprised an astonishing 25% of the trees in the forest over its range, from southern Maine through New England and much of New York and the mid-Atlantic states, southwesterly through Appalachia, most of Kentucky and Tennessee, into Mississippi and eastern Ohio, and into southern Ontario, and Indiana (see map). It's fast-growing, can grow taller than 125 feet, and obviously competes well against other trees. It was a valuable resource, both for its edible nuts (raw or roasted) and its hardwood lumber.

Mature healthy chestnut trees are extremely rare today. The importation of Asian chestnut trees started an epidemic of fungus blight in 1909 that over the years wiped out three *billion* American chestnut trees in a fashion similar to the Dutch elm disease that killed more than 100 million elms beginning in the 1930s. Fungus spores are borne by wind, animals, birds, and human clothing. The fungus doesn't kill the roots, so time after time, sprouts shoot up from old roots, live a few years, die from the blight, and the cycle repeats itself. So, as with the elm, many young chestnut trees are actually all around. But mature ones are now so rare that discovery of a large, healthy, fruit-bearing chestnut tree (say, anywhere from 40 to 85 feet tall) is reported with great interest in forestry circles. Pollination among healthy trees can be problematic, since they are so few and far between.

Map showing the historic range of the American Chestnut tree.



“Are there any large chestnut trees around here?” Yes, but they're rare. John Farrar has led us to a fairly large one 200 feet off Somerville Road (that's the unpaved track that goes west off Rte. 9 a mile south of Exit 23). The tree is near Warrensburg's boundary with Lake George. It's about 60' tall and 17" in diameter. Another, almost as tall and 14 inches in diameter, is located beside Route 9N, almost a quarter-mile above the look-out where Route 9N descends on the north side of Tongue Mountain and levels off next to Lake George. Unfortunately, both trees show signs of fungal disease and will die over the next few years.

John Farrar stands beside a rare 60' chestnut tree high up Somerville Road, December 18, 2009.



Chestnut restoration. Numerous organizations are working to produce disease-resistant strains of the American Chestnut tree. The College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University is one such organization, and expects to introduce resistant chestnut trees into the forests of New York State this year. Research is similar to that which has produced disease-resistant elms, i.e., breeding those trees in each successive generation that survive exposure to the fungus, thereby evolving and locking in natural immunity in the genetic makeup of the strain.



Mystery Photo

Places in Warrensburg's History

Can you identify this house? Or where it was located? Or any of the previous owners? Contact John at 798-0248 with your answer or email at jthastings@roadrunner.com. The photo in the last Quarterly was at one time called the Hawthorne and was (and still is) located on Hudson Street, although the small house to the right has been moved to Third Ave.



Warrensburgh Historical Society 2010 Calendar
Additional copies are still available from these locations: Nemecs, Glens Falls National Bank, Richards Library, & the Museum.

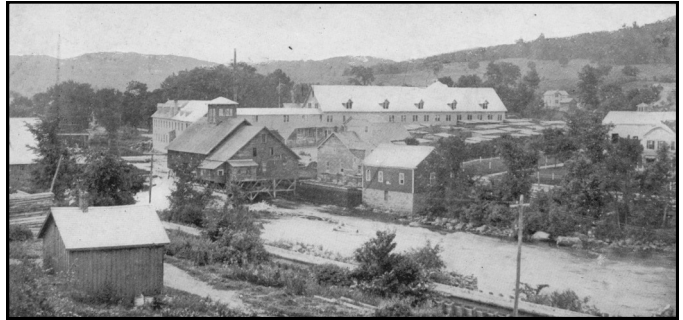


Shirt Factory

Photo courtesy Charles Wheeler

(Continued from page 1)

pared notes on working in the shirt factory laundry and pressing and stitching rooms. Several achieved managerial status as “floor ladies.” Joyce’s recollection, as a 16-year-old, of summer in the laundry was enough to convince her to go back to school in the fall. (She later returned as an adult and mother.) Charlotte’s fondest recollections were of the camaraderie with fellow workers, and the dinners and picnics that brightened their lives.



Warrensburgh Shirt Factory & Emerson Sawmill

Morg Crandall recalled his six-day weeks with D. E. Pasco and Sons, working at the grist mill and in other facilities on River Street. (The half-day on Saturday meant “getting to go home at 5 PM.”) Other mill workers in attendance included Cliff Davis, Gary Rounds, Rex Reynolds and Maynard Baker. All were happy to contribute their memories of working at Warrensburg’s mills.

The event was video recorded as a permanent record. We hope to create an edited version to permit viewing the highlights at a future meeting.



Museum Program

Photo courtesy Barbara Whitford