

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

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Amie Alden, County Historian

5 Murray Hill Drive, Mount Morris, New York 14510



THE REVOLUTIONARY DISCOVERY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OF BAKING



An esteemed scientist and native of Livingston County
is the *“father of American food technology.”*

These days the lowly red and white can of baking powder may sit in the back of the pantry cupboard, get little use and even less respect. Yet leaving this essential ingredient out of a recipe can mean the difference between a light and airy, mouth-watering biscuit and biting into something with the consistency of a hockey puck. Thanks to the genius of Eben Norton Horsford (1818-1875) born in the village of Leicester, the art and science of baking literally rose to new heights!



Traditional methods of baking had not changed for thousands of years until early nineteenth century. During the 1830s the components of baking powder were available but had to be kept separated until added to a moist mixture; even with precise handling results were unpredictable. To further complicate matters, one of the main elements, cream of tartar, had to be imported from Europe, limiting supply and driving up market costs. It was not until 1856 when Horsford discovered a way to combine the ingredients of baking powder in such a way to ensure consistently successful results. Horsford also developed the process to manufacture condensed milk.

The unique chemical structure of baking powder was patented and manufactured by Horsford and his business partner, George Wilson, at Rumford Chemical Works in East Providence, Rhode Island. This remarkable achievement was recently recognized when the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society, designated the development of Rumford Baking Powder a National Historic Chemical Landmark in 2006.

For more on the life of Eben N. Horsford and the global impact of his research and achievements see page 7.

The Town Historian's Page



***Civil War Sesquicentennial Planning Meeting:** Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2010, 10:30 A.M.–noon. County Historian's Office. All welcome. Discussion will include coordination of various events and projects at the town and county level from 2011–2015 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

***Grant Application Workshop:** Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF): Wednesday, December 1st. 9:00–1:00 P.M. Room 205. Livingston County Government Center, 6 Court Street, Geneseo, NY 14454. Learn about the LGRMIF application process and how to write a strong grant proposal. Examples of successful applications will be examined and analyzed. Workshop is free. Pre-registration required. <<http://www.archives.nysed.gov>> or contact Gail Fischer, Regional Advisory Officer, NYSED/NYS Archives at (585) 241 - 2827.

***Town Historian's Holiday Luncheon:** Wednesday, December 15, 2010, 11:30–2:00 P.M. Genesee River Restaurant, Rt. 36, Mt. Morris. RSVP by Dec. 10th.

***Call for Papers for the 2011 Conference on New York State History:** Deadline is December 31, 2010. This conference is an annual meeting of academic, public historians, and others with an interest in sharing primary source document research and information on NYS history. Special consideration is accorded local government historians. The conference will held at Copperstown, June 2-4, 2011. For more information contact Field Horne, Conference Chair at (518) 587-4962 or conferencechair@nysha.org.

Historical displays needed to exhibit

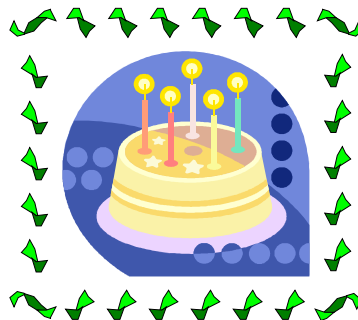
5th Anniversary Celebration

Livingston County's Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation

Saturday, December 4, 2010

11 Murray Hill Drive, Mt. Morris

The County Historian's Office will be coordinating displays for this event. Themes should be related to town/county history or a subject that residents will enjoy from the "good old days."



Please mount displays on foam (two-fold) boards. Table space for artifacts will also be available. Set up for event will be Friday, Dec. 3rd. Contact Amie or Sally for more information.

From the County Historian's Desk



“All history is local” but needs context to be understood

Autumn is by far my favorite season. As I ponder over what to share with the readers of this newsletter, the dazzling view from my desk of the trees at peak color on Murray Hill diverts my attention. Outside the falling leaves are piling up, and around my office the stacks of donated items are rising higher as well. Decisions must be made not only about *what* to archive or *where* to store various, but *why* to keep them in the first place. Then *how* best to make the information understandable for public use.

Putting the county's history in perspective has been my focus for the last seven years. Livingston County's history is comprised of millions of bits and pieces of information that have melded together over time to characterize our cultural heritage. To make any sense at all, it is critical that the stories of our community's past be interpreted within the broader context of American history and likewise world history. Unless a connection is made to the larger picture, local history remains disjointed and easily misunderstood. For example, my first major undertaking as County Historian, *The Sullivan Campaign of the Revolutionary War: The Impact on Livingston County*, provided a resource guide to the historic events that transpired in our area. Subsequently with the assistance and support of many others we were able to take the project to the next level by raising awareness across the state that this battle was pivotal to the outcome of the war. As a result, two hundred and thirty years after the 1779 campaign, the sites in Livingston County were honored with State and National Register designation.

Recently I was asked to present my project documenting the impact of the Vietnam War on Livingston County to students and faculty at Hartwick College in Oneonta. The professor who extended the invitation had seen my presentation at the Conference on New York State History in Ithaca last June and insisted that I bring the program to her students who had been studying the Vietnam War in class. Although the information I gathered pertained specifically to our local area, the research was general in nature so it had broad appeal. The program was indeed timely with so many of the students having direct links to loved ones who have served or are currently serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. From listening to their questions and comments afterward, I was so impressed that they focused on how to relate the Vietnam experience to the present-day situations in their lives and were grasping to get a better understanding the overall implications of war on society. With the 150th anniversary of the Civil War and the bicentennial of the War of 1812 on the horizon, it will be interesting how commemorative events are portrayed and interpreted around the country. No doubt new information will rise to the surface as the local impact of these 19th century monumental events are reflected upon in modern-day light.

I am continually amazed at the richness and diversity of our county's history and that there are still so many facets that remain unexplored. The Internet is imperative to my research and affords me as County Historian virtually unlimited access to digital collections, databases, indexes and reference resources. Travel to repositories is still required at times but the bulk of my initial research can be done online. In a instant I can verify information that in the past may have taken hours, days, or even weeks to find. With this huge advantage I am better able to connect dots and fill in gaps of our local history that were out of reach to my predecessors. I have a great deal of respect for prior County Historians though, if it were not for their patience and attention to detail, the vast archival and manuscript collection housed in this office would have little relevance today.

My goal when I began publishing *Out of the Archives* seven years ago was to include articles that the general audience as well as history-minded people would find interesting and informative. The alternative motive however, was not just to provide factual information about county history but to spark enthusiasm for the reader to take what they have read a step further. Judging from some of the comments received since 2004, I have (at least partially) accomplished the job I set out to do. There's lots more ahead. Thanks for reading.

Feedback is always welcome! *Amie*

The lure of Livingston County's natural landscape

as interpreted in late 18th and early 19th century art & literature

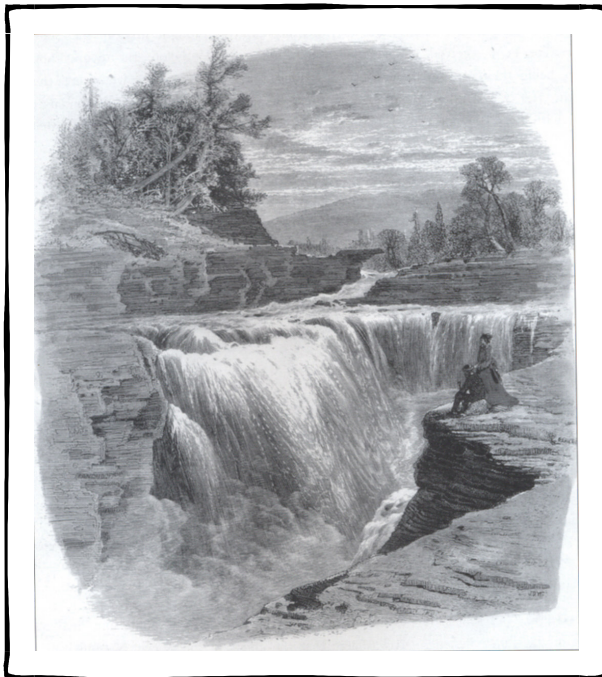
It

is common to take the natural landscape of the Genesee Valley and the land that comprises Livingston County in particular for granted. Few may realize however, that this area drew intense reaction from artists, authors and travelers as they first ventured west in the early 1800s. The lure of this fertile river valley also attracted capitalists, industrialists, and those seeking a physical and spiritual respite. As a result, word quickly spread nationally and across Europe that an Eden-like land existed in these parts unlike any other. This publicity was so intriguing that hoards of influential individuals came here specifically to explore and document the 'new' wilderness on their way west to Niagara and beyond. Their interpretations of the vistas left behind impressions of sublime beauty that have defined the area to present day.



Not long after the area opened for white settlement, the Marquis de Talleyrand, the famous exiled French statesman, was eager to inspect the natural features of this valley. In the autumn of 1793 a story is oft told of him standing on the bluff near the one of the early dams across the river. After admiring for an hour the scenery spread out before him to the eastward, he was said to exclaim, "It is the fairest landscape that the human eye ever looked upon."* Others intrigued by the region included Louis Phillipe (the last king to rule France 1830-1848) in June 1795, and the Duke de Liancourt. All this enthusiasm rapidly increased the value of the lands bought for a quarter of a dollar an acre to ten dollars within two years.

The esteemed American artist, John Trumbull and his contemporary British artist Benjamin West, were among the first to purchase large tracts of land in the valley along with the Wadsworths and others. Neither Trumbull or West ultimately settled here permanently, so it appears they may have had intentions of reselling their shares at a profit. Their short term goal though may have been of the opportunity to experience the thrill of adventure and artistic discovery. When the artist's close acquaintance author John Dunlap accompanied the Trumbull and West on a trip through the area around 1805, Dunlap was said to acknowledge the Genesee Country as one of "God's greatest natural treasures to the chosen people of a New Jerusalem."**



Livingston County was expanding in leaps and bounds during an era when Romanticism and nationalism were at its peak in America. Lengthy articles began appearing in numerous publications with exquisitely detailed engravings extolling the valley's unique characteristics and abundant resources. Not surprisingly, artist renderings accentuated local landmarks such as the rolling hills and open meadows, the cascading waterfalls and massive oak trees along the Genesee River.

Left: The Lower Falls located in Letchworth State Park from *Picturesque America*, 1874.

*Doty, Lockwood L. *History of Livingston County, New York*. Genesee, N.Y.: E.R. Doty, 1876, p 250-1.

**Love, Richard H, and Carl W. Peters. *Carl W. Peters: American Scene Painter from Rochester to Rockport*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 199. p.20.

My Own Dark Genesee

*They told me southern land could boast
Charms richer than mine own:
Sun, moon, and stars of brighter glow,
And winds of gentler tone;
And parting from each olden haunt,
Familiar rock and tree,
From that sweet vale I wandered far –
Washed by the Genesee...*

*Ambition from the scenes of youth
May others lure away
To chase the phantom of renown
Throughout their little day;
I would not, for a palace proud
And slave of pliant knee,
Forsake a cabin in thy vale,
My own dark Genesee.*

Hosmer 1854.

Poetic and romantic references to the ‘mystic’ of Genesee Valley region continued throughout the 19th century as the area grew and prospered. In 1805 Robert Munro author of “*A view of the present situation of the western parts of the state of New York, called the Genesee Country*,” found it difficult to describe the area without using an abundance of flowery adjectives. Although Monroe stated in the preface that his sole intension was to give a “plain and perspicuous” narration that is “candid and correct,” he was unsuccessful. Throughout the sixty-seven page essay he excessively used adjectives such as pleasant, flourishing, rich, uncommonly favorable, luxuriant, fertile, easy, healthy, abundant, plentiful, remarkable, excellent, extensively rich, and handsome in almost every sentence.

A true love of home and country comes shinning through when reading the two volumes of the county’s most prolific poet, William H. C. Hosmer. His *Poetical Works* clearly express the poet’s profound attachment to this land. Hosmer, who became Master of Chancery for New York, was born in 1814 in Avon, near the village the Seneca called Canawagus which translated to “smelly waters” after the discovery of sulpher springs. The village was still occupied by many Native Americans in Hosmer’s youth inspiring him to

chronicle (and romanticize) Indian legends through dozens of cantos, love poems, sonnets, and dirges. Hosmer is most known for his fictional Indian romance *Yonondio*, but the excerpt from “My Own Dark Genesee” (see above for the first and last verses) written sometime before 1854, reflects a man’s undying passion for the river and overpowering homesickness after drifting too far from ‘home.’

In 1836 Hudson River School artist Thomas Cole’s “Essay on American Scenery” includes the waterfalls of the Genesee in his list of places of “exceeding beauty” and identifies a waterfall itself as one of the “beutifiers of the earth” and a “voice of the landscape.” Three years later this important artist was commissioned by Samuel B. Ruggles, then New York State Canal Commissioner to capture the scenery of the Genesee River gorge before construction began of the canal through what is now Letchworth State Park. Cole, a founder of the Hudson River School is often referred to as the patriarch of American landscape painting. The purpose of the commission was to give as a gift to then New York Governor William Seward. Cole ultimately created two large-scale paintings, as well as several sketches from his visit in 1839. While Cole was traveling to the Genesee, he may have had a lot on his creative mind. Louis Ledgrand Noble, a friend and biographer of Cole writes how the artists’ experience in the Genesee Valley may have influenced one his most highly recognized series of four paintings called the *Voyage of Life*. (continued next page)



Right: Genesee Scenery, 1847. Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

The lure of Livingston County's natural landscape *continued*



Cole's famous *Voyage of Life* series represents the four stages of life: childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. In each painting a person travels through a wilderness in a boat on a river with a guardian angel watching overhead. Louis L. Noble chronicled Cole's trip on his way to the Genesee River for the purpose of studying and taking sketches of the picturesque scenery in his biography, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1856). It is remarkable to realize that Cole's trip to this region left such a dramatic legacy to the world of American art.

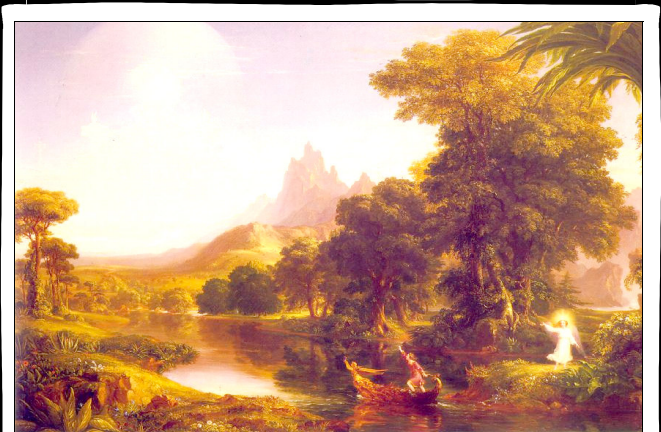
Several other distinguished painters of the Hudson River School journeyed to the area in succession during the 19th century including John W. Casilear, Frederick E. Church, Jasper F. Cropsey, Asher Durand, David Johnson, and John F. Kensett. In addition, there were many other lesser known local artists like Agnes Jeffrey whose painting *The Big Tree, ca. 1835, Geneseo, N.Y.*, documented what few local residents realize was a landmark that remains among America's most notable trees. Historian Benjamin Lossing spent fifteen years documenting ancient trees across America in the mid-19th century, learning about the traditions that made them famous, sketching them, and studying every detail for his historical journals. He called these noble giants the "Patriarchs of society" that "stir the spirit of worship in the human soul." When Lossing's essay "American Historical Trees" was published in Harper's Magazine in 1862, *The Big Tree* in Geneseo was the first to be described.

Numerous publications in the last few decades have repeated the stories, legends, and traditions of the area and descriptions of the natural landscape but seldom delve into the real reason *why* the area has been labeled time and time again as unique. For Bob Bickle, a local newspaper in the 1970s, the reason was clearly described in his introduction for the last in a series published in 1977 by the Genesee Valley Council on the Arts, *Up and Down the River: Art & geography of the Genesee River*.

There's a wholeness about the Genesee. It has everything, in just the right quantity...every good river ought to have a touch of grandeur. It was a disciplined artist who designed the Genesee, with a highly developed perception of form...The river cannot be perceived apart from its valley, and its name acknowledges this. The Indian origins mean "beautiful valley."...the way the valley captures people is a phenomenon which sometimes surprises long time residents accustomed to the valley's charm...Its scale is perfect for the settled life, intimate without being claustrophobic, spacious without being intimidating...And the valley is indeed beautiful. Out of the simplest elements - fields, cloud, sky, and atmosphere - it fashions an infinite series of panoramas, no two ever exactly alike, each surprising the eye and refreshing the spirit...The river and its valley make a bountiful gift.

- *Up and Down the River, GVCA 1977*

The Genesee Valley is indeed defined by the natural landscape and the Genesee River coexisting in harmony, creating the perfect balance between the savage wilderness and comforts of civilization. Almost two hundred years after the Genesee Valley opened to white settlement, Bob Bickle's words reflect Henry David Thoreau's utopia of a half-cultivated world. So much of our "beautiful valley" has been altered since the days of the Seneca but fortunately the landscape in most parts still commands center stage.



Above: Voyage of Life: Youth. Thomas Cole. 1842.

"The Voyage of Life, which he [Cole] was now mentally composing, exhibits here and there, in the sweet windings of its stream, in its alternately rapid and placid current, in the fine verdure of its banks and grove, and in its delightful atmospheric effects, the influence upon his mind and feelings of this pleasant and refreshing excursion."

- Louis Noble. *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* 1856.

Eben Norton Horsford (1818-1875)



A young man from Livingston County ranks among America's most distinguished chemists and educators



Prior to the Civil War, those interested in pursuing higher education in science and technology went to Europe to study. Between 1844-1846, Eben N. Horsford became only the second American student to study under the Justus Liebig, one of Germany's most illustrious chemists. Liebig stressed the use of "chemical truths to the practical arts of life" and Horsford used his scientific training to those ends. While still in Germany, he became a candidate for a professorship of science at Harvard University and assumed the esteemed position of Rumford professorship of applied science at Harvard in 1847. This marked the beginning of a distinguished career in chemistry noted for major achievements that helped define the character of early American science.

Horsford was born in 1818 at Moscow (now the village of Leicester) the son of Jerediah and Charity Norton Horsford. Jerediah, whose biography is well-known in Livingston County history, served in the New York State Legislature in 1830 and was elected to the U. S. Congress in 1856. The elder Horsfords were supporters of the anti-slavery movement and Eben's boyhood home, once operated by his parents as a public house (tavern), is a reputed site on the Underground Railroad. Charles L. Jackson writes in the *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences** that Eben was educated locally as a young boy then attended the Rensselaer Institute Polytechnic Institute of Troy, New York, graduating in 1837 as a civil engineer.

While studying at the Rensselaer Institute Horsford spent his vacations in earning money teaching at Leroy, and working on the surveys for the New York and Erie, and the Rochester and Auburn Railroads. After graduation, Horsford was employed on the Geological Survey of the State of New York, and in 1840 was appointed Professor of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the Albany Female Academy, a position which he held for four years. During the early 1840s, Eben Horsford took up the study of Daguerre's photographic process with Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph. This work attracted the attention of those in the scientific world in this country and in Europe leading Horsford to become a sought after lecturer and deeply involved in scientific research. While teaching at the Female Academy he fell in love with a student, Mary L'Hommedieu Gardiner, who became his first wife. The couple married in 1847 and had four daughters. Upon her death in 1855, Horsford married Mary's sister Phoebe Dayton Gardiner and together they had a daughter.

Horsford became established at Harvard as a professor and his career progressed. He developed a laboratory for chemical analysis modeled on Liebig's facility and continued his interest in the chemistry of nutrition, with early studies on potatoes and the condensation of milk. After 1854 his main preoccupation was to discover a substitute yeast in the baking of bread. He developed a phosphatic baking powder and soon entered into partnership with Geroge F. Wilson, establishing the Rumford Chemical Works near Providence, Rhode Island. The new chemical industry prospered and in 1861 Horsford retired from academia.

During the Civil War, Horsford developed what he called a 'marching ration' composed of meat and grain but the product was unsuccessful. After that time he took a dramatic turn away from the chemistry of nutrition and devoted his life to proving the Vikings established a settlement near Boston. By all accounts, Eben Norton Horsford was a generous man and with five daughters it is not surprising that he donated a large portion of his acquired wealth to Wellsley College, a small women's college in Massachusetts. In his later years he and his wife continued to live in Cambridge and spent summers at the family estate in Shelter Island, N.Y.

Eben Norton Horsford died on January 1, 1893. His vast contributions to the world of science are numerous to mention. Judging from the lengthy obituaries, he was a cordial man with a warm heart and brilliant mind. A person who led a useful life and left behind an extraordinary legacy.

*Eben Norton Horsford by Charles L. Jackson: *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 28 (May, 1892 -May, 1893), pp. 340-346 (<http://www.jstor.org>). Information for this article was derived from other sources including: The American Chemical Society site (www.acs.org) and files of Livingston County Historian.

Hats off to all veterans!



Out of the Archives



Livingston County Historian's Office

Amie Alden, County Historian

Sally Schmoldt, Clerk

5 Murray Hill Drive

Mt. Morris, NY 14510

(585) 243-7955

fax: (585) 243-7956

email: Historian@co.livingston.ny.us

Office hours: Monday-Friday, 1:00–4:30 pm

www.co.livingston.state.ny.us