

# The St. Lawrence County Historical Association QUARTERLY

Volume LIII

Number 1

2008



**Sewall Raymond, Potash Merchant**

**Jay Fairbanks, Civil War Veteran**

# The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright Museum

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its trustees.

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The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit membership organization and museum which serves as an educational resource for the use and benefit of the citizens of St. Lawrence County and others interested in the County's history and traditions. The Association collects and preserves archival material and artifacts pertinent to the County's history. In cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations, the Association promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the County's rich history through publications, exhibits, and programs. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association operates within museum standards established by the American Association of Museums.

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Membership in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is open to all interested parties. Annual membership dues are: Individual \$30; Senior/Student \$25; Family \$40; Contributor \$55; Supporter, \$100; Patron \$250. Members receive the SLCHA Quarterly, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

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**Contributions:**

*The SLCHA Quarterly* welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Editors, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.



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John and Susan Omohundro

## On the Cover

A page from Sewall Raymond's ledger, 1815 to 1820, from the shop he built on Market Street at Elm, in Potsdam, courtesy of Deborah Cady. Inset: Oil portrait of Raymond, courtesy of Potsdam Public Museum.



# From the County Historian

by Trent Trulock



*The Silas Wright House, home of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.*

Museum collections often grow by donations, which is mainly the case here at the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. People may come across historical items at home that they no longer have a use for and want to give to a good home. Or these items are thrust upon them when a family member passes away and they don't know what to do with the stuff, but they know they shouldn't just throw it out. And museums love donations. Usually there is not enough money (or any money) in the budget to purchase artifacts and archival pieces. Many of these donations come from individuals or families, but occasionally they come from other organizations. At times museums end up accepting items that are loaned, not donated to them. Such is the case of 50 volumes of the State of New York Report of the Adjutant General that have been loaned by the Massena Public Library to the SLCHA.

These volumes highlight the Civil War military engagements seen by New York State regiments and list the members of the regiments along with information such as muster in/out dates and location, age, and rank. This type of information is invaluable to family history and military researchers, and is not easily available from other sources.

The SLCHA is a major stopping point for researchers looking for information regarding St. Lawrence County history, the Civil War, and family history. While the SLCHA has a vast Civil War collection, we only had some of the volumes from the Adjutant General's Report and are missing key volumes that researchers often request. That is where the

volumes from the Massena Library come into the picture. One of our members who is researching soldiers who were residents of St. Lawrence County let us know that the Massena Library had volumes of the Adjutant General's Report that we did not have and that it might be interested in loaning them to us. That got the wheels rolling, so to speak.

Now these loaned volumes are stored in the SLCHA's locked, climate-controlled archival storage room. Researchers request one volume at a time to examine, then a staff member or volunteer retrieves the volume from the secure storage room and oversees the use of the volume in the SLCHA's public research room.

Normally museums do not like to take items on long-term loan, because the museum is responsible for the item and has to store and care for it without owning it. But occasionally an item or group of items of great importance can only be made available by loan. The story of these volumes is a wonderful example of how two cultural institutions can work together to improve access to the county's history. It is a pleasure to have the *State of New York Report of the Adjutant General* volumes from the Massena Library available at the SLCHA for the family history and Civil War researchers who visit, because these books have been put to good use.

If you are in the area, stop in to take a look at these volumes, as well as the rest of the Civil War collection or any of the other collections that the SLCHA houses. You never know what interesting tidbit of St. Lawrence County history you might find there.

# Sewall Raymond and the Potash Industry

John and Susan Omohundro

*Potash: Potassium carbonate . . . obtained in colored impure form by leaching wood ashes, evaporating the lye usually in an iron pot . . . Webster's Third New International Dictionary.*

In the summer of 1998 one of us (Susan) had an opportunity to explore the attic of 30 Market Street, a shop in downtown Potsdam built of local sandstone in 1821 by Sewall Raymond and Liberty Knowles. She was there with friends, Bob and Ellen Burns, to investigate the building's structure, but the threesome also discovered a number of historic items in the debris on the attic floor, ranging from 19th century barrels, shop signs, newspapers, and stove pipes to late 20th century cans and bottles. The most exciting discovery, however, was Sewall Raymond's ledger for the years 1815 to 1820, which contained copies of business letters plus records of his potash accounts.

At that time Susan scarcely understood what potash was; it was the building itself that interested her: 30 Market Street has the distinction of being the first building constructed entirely of Potsdam red sandstone.

The 28 x 45-foot shop (now the Little Italy restaurant) is a relatively plain building with Federal style details, most evident in the dentil trim under the cornice, flared lintels over the 8-over-8 sash windows, and the lovely arched windows outlined in voussoirs (uniformly-sized flared stones) on the third floor. The pieces of sandstone in the walls are relatively small compared to those in later buildings, and they are laid in rows like bricks. The stone came from a quarry later known as the Parmeter quarry, on the west side of the Racquette River near the



*Sewall Raymond's shop at the corner of Market and Elm in Potsdam, as seen in 1998.*

Potsdam-Pierrepont town line.

Sewall Raymond operated a general store in this building and collected local products from farmers to sell downstate and in Canada. He arrived in Potsdam from Massachusetts in 1805 at age 18, and worked as a surveyor for his cousin Benjamin Raymond, the town's first land agent. He continued to do surveying work and land transactions for many years but soon began to buy and sell goods. He and other Potsdam merchants shipped local products north through Ogdensburg, Louisville, Fort Covington, or Plattsburgh to Montreal, thence to Europe. Products also were transported south to Utica, Rome, and Albany, then on to New York and ultimately Europe (Sanford 1903). He received in return groceries such as flour, tea, tobacco, and rum, and manufactured



Susan Omohundro



John Omohundro

*Top: the pulley wheel in Sewall Raymond's shop attic raised heavy loads from the ground floor loading dock on Elm Street. Below: a similar wheel reproduced in the Erie Canal Village museum, Rome, New York.*

products such as nails, cloth, tableware, and cast iron kettles for making potash.

As noted in the ledger, Raymond's largest export was potash and its close relative, pearl ash. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, potash was one of the young republic's most profitable exports. Potash was America's first industrial chemical and the subject of the first patent issued by the U.S. government, in 1790 [note 1]. America was the world's largest potash producer for nearly a century, and European industry's main supplier. The Seneca Chief, the first barge to navigate the entire Erie Canal, carried a load of potash from Buffalo to

New York City during the canal's opening ceremonies in 1825 (Shaw 1966:184).

As important as potash once was, a 21st century reader may wonder what it is. Potash refers to salts of potassium such as potassium chloride (KCl) or potassium carbonate (K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>). The element potassium was isolated by Humphry Davy in 1807, when the potash industry was already centuries old. Potash has long been used in making soap, saltpeter, alum, glass, gunpowder, and paper. It is also used in tanning leather, fulling wool, dyeing fabrics, and bleaching cotton. As early as 1800, for example, entrepreneurs in the town of Oswegatchie set up a fulling mill on the river of that name, importing large cast-iron kettles "at great expense" to make potash for the fulling process (Hough 392).

Old-style potash was made from wood ashes. Its extraction resembled an alchemist's purification process and could be done in a settler's backyard, but in this region in the nineteenth century it increasingly was conducted in commercial asheries. First, ashes were packed into a barrel or vat and leached with water, which exited through holes at the base as a tea-colored lye, KOH, or potassium hydroxide. The lye was then boiled in kettles (the "pot" of pot-ash) until it dehydrated, becoming brittle "black salts." As with maple sugar production, care had to be taken not to burn the product or permit it to stick to the pot, and individual batches varied in purity and concentration.

The black salts could be packed in a barrel and sold, or further refined by baking with indirect high heat (1000 degrees F.) in brick kilns, burning off the impurities from the skimmed, bubbling molten mass, which eventually turned white or pearl-grey and was known as pearl ash [note 2]. This refined product was then cooled, broken into

note 1: Samuel Hopkin's U. S. Patent #1, awarded July 31, 1790, involved burning the raw ashes in a kiln before leaching them, resulting in higher potassium content. We don't know if any north country asheries utilized Hopkin's patent, because people here generally did the leaching step first.





Benjamin Pykles

*Black salts remained after the leachate was boiled down. The farmer traded the salts to the merchant in lieu of cash. Asheries, often operated by shopkeepers, further processed these salts into pearl ash, which was transported to Montreal or New York City.*

chunks, packed 500 pounds to a barrel, and transported to market.

Upon arrival in industrial cities, some of the potash might be re-heated, adding more carbonate to produce saleratus, a leavening agent commonly used in North America before bicarbonate of soda.

Not until the great potassium-bearing beds of Strassfurt, Germany were opened in the 1860s did the old-style “pot-ash” manufacturing begin to fade in the North Country. Today, quarried potash from the American West and Europe continues to be an important industrial and agricultural chemical.



Benjamin Pykles

*Interior of a reconstructed ashery in Kirtland, Ohio. Ashes were packed into the wide-bottomed barrels and leached with water. The leachate was cooked to form black salts in the large iron kettles in foreground.*

Note 2: Home producers made another product confusingly called pearl ash— a yellowish low-grade potash formed by melting the black salts in kettles, dissolving the product in water, skimming the more purified liquid off the settled impurities, and then boiling down this liquid.

In St. Lawrence County, Ogdensburg was an ash collection center in the earliest years of settlement. Pearl ash shipped from that port brought \$200-300 a ton in Montreal, a small fortune by the standards of the day. Trees were felled throughout the north country and the potash industry blossomed. In 1804, Samuel Ogden’s agent, Nathan Ford, sent a great raft down the river toward Montreal loaded with local flour, potash, barley, and boards (Hough 396). In 1806, northern New York exported \$3,500 worth of potash; by 1808 it exported \$9,000 worth (Hedrick 1933:140). In 1808 Benjamin Raymond exhorted his cousin Sewall to promote

. . . our ashes on the speedy manufacture and exportation of which everything [depends] . . . do everything in your power to encourage the making of pot and pearl ash. Freely pay any money you may have to safe [creditworthy] people to purchase kettles. (Leete 1903)

The British embargo of 1807 was intended to prevent Americans from trading with the Napoleonic enemy, and U.S. laws restricted exportation to the British as well. But Benjamin Raymond observed that “the embargo will do more to enrich St. Lawrence County than anything else.” (Leete 1903). Northern merchants, inspired by the skyrocketing price of the commodity, smuggled potash into Canada—probably the first systematic smuggling operation in a long history of illegal trade over that border. They offloaded their barrels on certain islands in the St. Lawrence River, where, Benjamin Raymond noted, even if there had been customs officers present,

. . . they could not prevent our carrying produce on to the islands in the St. Lawrence which may belong to us, and the British may take it off, for the islands may belong to them— no boundary as yet, in 1808, having been established (Leete 1903).

By 1811 North America was producing 74% of Britain’s industrial potash (Pykles 2002). The War of 1812 forced a brief halt

to the trade, but by 1815 North American exports to Europe were already higher than before the war (Pykles 2002). Demand for potash by fledgling American industries in the northeast was also growing.

The potash trade influenced the layout of the county's road system. One road, running north just east of Malone to Fort Covington, was known as the "potash road" because it led to boat landings on the St. Lawrence River (*Fort Covington Sun* 1962). Another road went north from Potsdam to Louisville, where potash would be shipped by canoe on the St. Lawrence River to Montreal (Hough 1853:363). When Erastus Hall, a settler of Norfolk, looked over lands to purchase in May of 1809, he and land agent Benjamin Raymond traveled to Raymondville on roads that had been cut for transporting potash [Note 3].

As we will show, Sewall Raymond's mercantile business had its setbacks, but by 1818 he had bought land and water privileges from John Clarkson for establishing his own ashery on Raymond Street (at the site of the old water treatment plant). His business prospered sufficiently that by 1821 he evidently felt that he needed a proper establishment to conduct business. Hence he contracted for a stone building in which to sell a myriad of products ranging from hardware to groceries to bolts of fabric. Fortunately for historians, Raymond retained much of his correspondence and business records. Thus we know that construction of the Market Street shop began in May of 1821 and was completed by September, the swift completion made possible by having the stone and other needed materials readily at hand. Anthony Furness, the master mason, was paid \$1.50 a day, plus room and board.

Note 3: Benjamin Raymond established his own small community of Raymondville just downriver from the last Raquette River rapids, where flatboats could be poled or paddled to the St. Lawrence River for the Montreal trade. It is likely that those boats carried out pot and pearl ash.

Usually four or five men worked on the masonry, sometimes as many as seven, for about two months.

Since cash was scarce, the pay for the workmen included whiskey, about two bottles a day for the group. Although Raymond complained that one workman "got drunk and did more damage than his work was worth," some of the whiskey may have been passed on to others through barter transactions. Potash and whiskey both served as common currency at the time.

Homesteaders and entrepreneurs who first moved into the state's northern frontier found themselves in a cash-poor but tree-rich land. The forested landscape needed to be converted quickly to farmland from which produce could be exchanged for other necessities. The settlers' first challenge was to clear the trees and plant crops, to feed themselves and their animals. The trees were often girdled to kill them, and the first crops were planted in the leafless understory. In the next season the trees were felled and burnt, returning some nutrients to the soil.

But settlers also needed cash to make payments on land and taxes and to buy the goods they couldn't produce at home. Trees and grain crops yielded products that substituted for cash. Ashes from the burnt trees could be converted into potash, and part of the corn, barley, and rye harvest could be distilled into whiskey. Ashes and whiskey were portable and readily marketable, so they became a common informal currency. Shops like Sewall Raymond's received and distributed whiskey, black salts, and rudimentary pearl ash as payments for goods. Agents like Raymond often increased their profit on potash products by refining them further in their asheries before sale to the port cities.

One farmer could clear and burn about four acres a year, which yielded enough ashes for eight tons of black salts (*Potsdam Courier Freeman* 1952, Chittenden 1979). A farmer's time and equipment were limited, however, so the production of black salts was usually a small fraction of that. Deliveries earned



three to five cents a pound in both cash and goods in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Landon 1932).

Some men contracted with a merchant to produce potash, the contract typically worded as follows:

John and Richard Roe, having received a one hundred gallon Taberg potash kettle of the value of \$52.00, agree we are to go to work immediately at the potash business and follow the same through the season. All potash made will be delivered to Mr. A, who will sell the same on commission. One half the value of the potash to be paid immediately in goods or cash, the balance to apply on the payment of the kettle. (Leete 1903)

In a later transaction, Gilbert Covey and Reuben Post were contracted as laborers by Hopkinton merchant Clark Chittenden to clear ten acres on the Hopkins farm for ten dollars per acre and ten cents per bushel of ashes. The men acquired as much as 600 bushels of ashes per acre (Sanford 1903: 148).

Potash production demanded wood for ashes, fuel, and barrels. A bushel of ashes could produce 7 or 8 pounds of black salts. Hardwoods, such as black ash, maple, beech, and elm, made the best ashes. A large elm might yield 28 bushels of ashes, which became 200 pounds of black salts (Chittenden 1979). Thirty cords of wood made a ton of ashes, which converted to 333 pounds of potash (Landon 1932). An ashery operator in Morley calculated that he used 1000 cords of wood to fire the kettles and ovens for a year (*Fort Covington Sun* 1962). Potash also consumed much water for leaching and cooling, so asheries were often sited on river banks near cooperages and tanneries. The cooperage provided the barrels and the tannery provided hemlock gum, which was added to the kettles to prevent boil-overs. Note the arrangement of buildings in Morley illustrated on p. 13.

Besides Sewall Raymond's ashery on Raymond Street, the village of Potsdam

eventually supported five other asheries—an indication of the industry's profitability. All were sited near the Raquette River. In 1850, Samuel Partridge and Zenas Clark, both merchants on Market Street, operated an ashery in a stone building on River Street (now Riverside Drive and Ives Park). Partnering with Benjamin Cox, Clark also made potash in a wooden building near the "engine house" (probably the fire station on Raymond Street), W. W. Goulding owned an ashery on Willow Street, and Abner Pride operated one on Market Street. John Burroughs ran an ashery at the Union, now called Unionville. In 1845, the county supported 97 asheries like Raymond's, constituting 13% of all asheries in the state (Chittenden 1979). These asheries were each producing \$2000 to \$6000 worth of potash annually. At that time, St. Lawrence County was the second largest potash producer in the state, after Jefferson County (U. S. Census 1840).



Benjamin Pykles

*Exterior view of the reconstructed ashery in Kirtland, Ohio, on the banks of a Chagrin River tributary. Note the four leaching hoppers.*

It was not easy for merchants to run a profitable business in the early nineteenth century. Raymond's ledger contains copies of business letters that show clearly that cash flow was a constant problem. Transportation to and from the north country was often difficult and slow. Much of Raymond's potash and merchandise moved between Potsdam and the Utica-Rome area. Canada was closer but presented many difficulties during and after the War of 1812.

In 1815, the first year recorded in the ledger, Raymond was continually recalculating the advantages and disadvantages of deal-

ing with his Montreal and New York trading partners. In Montreal, his primary buyer was Horatio Gates. On March 25, Gates wrote:

Sir, referring to my letter of the 12th, have now to merely say that I have letters, a number of them from Liverpool. . .and from Bordeaux... ashes were saleable in Liverpool at 77 a bbl and were wanted in France, there is almost as many opinions as to their maintaining their prices, advancing or declines as there [are] more writers. The safer calculation would be to look for a little decline . . .

Not only was it hard to decide the best time and place to sell potash, it was equally difficult to transport and pay for basic goods needed by Potsdam settlers. In the summer of 1815 Raymond complains to his downstate supplier, “there is not a nail to be sold within two miles of this place that I know of. I should like at least 1200 D [a weight of nails] of different sizes ...” He also asks for 7 x 9 window glass and yarn.

I am going to Montreal next week if

nothing happens more than I know of. I think I shall be able to let you have some money when I return at any rate I will pay you for the nails within one month after they arrived. My present intention is to make you some pretty handsome payments before winter. I have considerable potash in the work . . .though I do not boil it on my own hook. It sells at a good price . . .

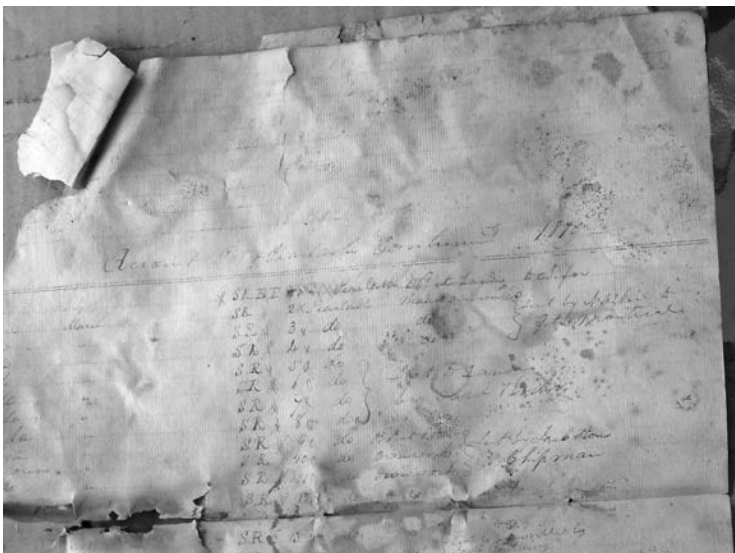
Soon he reports, I have just returned from Montreal. I can not procure any of those things you mentioned in your letter. Have you received a letter from me respecting cotton yarn & nails lately? I want nails & Glass very much & cotton yarn is very saleable.

Gates sent Raymond this letter from Montreal dated March 12, 1816:

Sir I have only time to say that I have now letters from England up to about this 1st Jany when ashes had a little improved from former prices and were very scarce. It is remarked that as but very few pearlashes had arrived from Russia and those of inferior quality that pearls from this country would likely get the ascendancy of pots. They are quoted at Liverpool 27 Dec at 83/ and 85/ for pots and pearls. I think quite as favourably of the articles as when you left, yet I do believe they must fall in England before next Sept. I think you will be safe in making exertions to increase quantity for the early part of the season. . . Your puncheon rum went off yesterday.

One of Raymond’s transfer agents was John Chipman, who wrote from Hamilton, Ontario:

. . . we shall be happy at all times to receive the potash you may send to our care and will forward the same to Montreal as on good terms as you can get it down by any other persons. We have purchased a war boat at Schenectady and are hourly expecting its arrival. It will leave this place for



Detail of page from Sewall Raymond’s ledger of potash records headed “account Pot and Pearl Ashes 1819.” Columns list seller, buyer, date, whether pot or pearl ash, gross weight, tare and net weights, and remarks, such as “bot. with cash” or “carried down by G Harris.” The broker, on this page, is Horatio Gates, in Montreal. Courtesy of Deborah Cady.

Montreal in the course of the coming week and will probably return about the middle of June at which time your potash will be forwarded. We have taken care to get a sturdy and trusty man who is an experienced Boatman to take charge of the boat. . . I think whatever is put on board will be safely delivered without injury. . . PS Should you want a few barrels of pork and salt next week we can furnish you.

Later in the spring of 1816 Raymond expressed frustration over goods ordered from Montreal when a boatman charged more than he expected and could not account for a missing barrel of sugar. He sent potash north to Canada, but he looked for most of his supplies of household goods southward to Utica and Rome, where his cousin Benjamin had once lived. In February he applied for credit with a Mr. Burton. "...can you procure two or three well assorted crates of crockery to send on by sleighing if you can I should like it the duties come so high the other way [Canada] I hate to send there for anything." [Indeed, the duty was two and a half times the value on lumber and wood products, grains and livestock.] He also asks for rum, brandy, tea, sugar, nails, skillets, fabric, coat buttons, shovels, bedcords, writing paper, vegetable seeds and more. In April when his correspondent asks him to be more specific about his wants he replies

I cannot tell all I want for I can't think of all neither do I know what you may see that I should want. I can give you a general view by saying I want about \$2000 Dollars worth of articles in all say 10 or 12 hundred dollars in dry goods 3 or 400 Dol. Groceries about 100 Dol Hardware 200 crockery & glassware...

He then goes on to specify various wants: fabrics, hair combs, ginger, brandy, wine, coffee, snuff bladders, chocolate, raisins, nails [again!], knives & forks, candlesticks, bibles, quills, and so on and on.

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**“Our whole population is on the border of starvation and has been for the 2 months past so that every cent that could be raised has been laid out in the purchase of something to eat.”**

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But 1816 was not a good year. It was notorious in the northeast as the year without summer, the prolonged cold spell caused by volcanic eruptions in Indonesia that put dust into the upper atmosphere, lessening the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Frost occurred every month, most crops failed, and the settlers were faced with ruin. Already by July 4, Lester Taylor & Company, merchants in Montreal, reported:

Flour has risen to 60f to 67f6 per barrel; a price which (considering instead of supplying any foreign demand, we are actually receiving considerable supplies from England) seems almost incredible and from the general appearance of the crops, we are warranted in believing, that the present prices will not decline much after our harvest, unless we should receive very large supplies from your part of the country. Notwithstanding daily arrivals of Pork from Ireland, the demand for American continues pretty steady at 110f to 112f for prime, 160f to 170f for mess. Butter, lard, corn, oats, etc. meet with a ready demand at fair prices.

While the cost of foodstuffs was soaring, the price paid for potash was falling. At the beginning of 1816, potash brought 85 pounds sterling per ton in Liverpool. By June 17, the price there had fallen to 68 pounds, so Lester-Taylor & Co. informed Raymond in August that they would pay only 45 in Montreal “and we should not be surprised to see them tomorrow at 37.”

In the summer of 1816 Raymond sent \$300 to his supplier in Utica, 75 in specie [coin] and 225 in paper, but this was only a



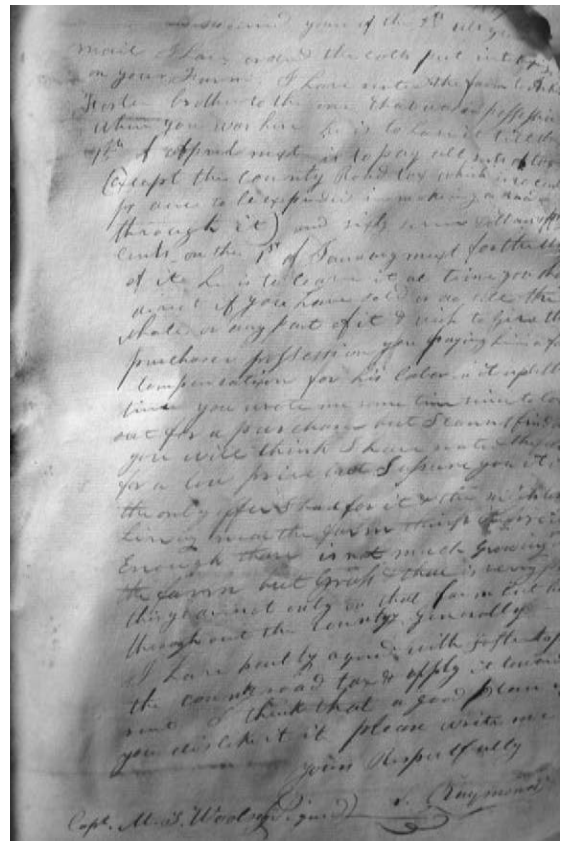
portion of what he owed. His accompanying note stated,

I should have been glad to have sent more but I cannot on an average collect a dollar a week and as for selling for cash that is out of the question. Our whole population is on the border of starvation and has been for the 2 months past so that every cent that could be raised has been laid out in the purchase of something to eat. There is now a prospect of a good harvest in case we have such a one I hope people will be able to pay better & buy more.

In late August he wrote to William Wright, one of his chief downstate suppliers:

I want you should come out any time when you can but not with the intention of receiving any money of me at present. I never saw the times half as hard for collecting. We have had starvation amongst us this year and the people have not got over it yet. I have not been able to sell one quarter of the goods I had last year and what I have sold have not received pay for & cannot till next winter. I am quite discouraged. I have not sold 10d of the nails nor can I.

Nevertheless, in January of 1817 Raymond made plans to send potash to Horatio Gates, his main contact in Montreal, while sending another lament to Wright about his inability to pay him and asserting, "I am taking all the grain & potash I can get. . . If I can get hold of any money you shall have it." In March he sent three barrels of potash south to Wright and requested various items of merchandise for the shop. In June he sent 12 barrels to Louisville, destined for Gates in Montreal. In late June he expressed disappointment at the price the three barrels had brought in Utica, but in July he sent \$201.17 "in Paper gold & silver to be deposited in the Utica Bank for you." In September he suggested to Wright that he could provide anywhere from 500 to 3000 gallons of whisky, and that "I should suppose you might trade with



John Omohundro

*Ledger page showing copy of letter from Raymond to Capt. M. S. Woolsey dated July 11, 1817 reporting on Raymond's brokering the sale of Woolsey's farm.*

the canal folks in whisky very well [Note 4]. I wish you would find out what you can do & what the most you can afford to give is & let me know soon." In November, still short of cash, he requested a loan of \$2,000 from John Clarkson, the wealthiest man in Potsdam. We don't have Clarkson's reply. We know only that Clarkson later held a note against the Market Street shop, and that the debt was terminated in 1827.

In early 1818 the cousins Sewall and Benjamin Raymond both traded in pot and pearl ash with Montreal in spite of problems created by transportation and duties. At the

Note 4: State legislation authorizing the construction of the Erie Canal was passed in 1817, by which time some canal companies had already opened several shorter canals in the Mohawk Valley.

same time, Sewall acquired goods from Utica, including a large potash kettle, probably for his own ashery. But once again, by the end of the year, he was unable to pay Wright all that he owed. He sent

. . . 400 dollars all that I was able to get in Montreal from which Place I just returned. Ashes had fallen about a week before I arrived in Montreal with mine about 50 dollars in the ton. My loss in consequence of it was something considerable . . .

In October of 1819 Raymond sent nine barrels of pearl ash down the St. Lawrence River to Gates with this admonition,

I do not wish to have it sold till the last of the shipping goes out unless the price rising materially & is likely to fall again. I cannot afford to sell it at so low a rate as it is now selling. The amount due from me to you shall be adjusted some other way to your satisfaction. I shall have about a dozen Bbls more & Pot & Pearlashes to send this fall...

The last letter in the ledger, dated January, 1820, and addressed to Wright, complains yet again about the scarcity of cash and the low prices for pot and pearl ash. Raymond writes that he is unable to pay his debts to Wright for merchandise unless given more time. He had married Sally Hopkins, the daughter of Hopkinton's founder and merchant, in 1814. Bad times for Sally's family in Hopkinton had undermined his own affairs.

I have been depending upon assistance from my brother in law [Benjamin W. Hopkins] but he is dead and the consequence has been the ruin of all my wife's family as her father [Roswell L.] was bound for [Benjamin's] debts to a large amount which he cannot pay. [Note 5]

Adding to Raymond's difficulties in 1819 was a national financial panic brought on by the debts incurred in the War of 1812 that produced bank failures and inflation.

His future may have looked bleak in 1820, but in 1821 Raymond was building

his sandstone shop at Market and Elm. How do we explain this shift from debtor to investor? Co-investor Liberty Knowles surely helped with finances. Ongoing construction of the Erie Canal in 1821 may have revived optimism in New York, as a Raymond letter suggested (see above). Last but not least, access to cash was not always essential on the northern frontier, where barter was still widespread.

Sewall Raymond survived these and later cash shortages, price fluctuations, family crises, and financial panics (there was another panic in 1837 caused by speculation in gold and silver), to remain in business for thirty more years. In 1851 he retired and rented out his sandstone shop. Meanwhile, in the last decade of his trade, the potash industry was undergoing a profound change.

**B**y the 1840s much of the land in St. Lawrence County had been cleared. Cash income was being generated from wool supplied to northeastern textile factories, so farmers got out of the side-business of making black salts from burning whole trees that now supplied a more profitable market as sawn lumber. Potash was still in demand, but its manufacture had become either a full-time business, like smithing and milling, or an adjunct to mercantile trading, as was the case with Sewall Raymond.

The trend was for asheries to buy less black salts from part-time producers and more raw ashes from the many cords of wood that residents burnt annually in their fireplaces or cast iron stoves. Robert and Crawford Johnson, and their father John before them, operated this type of ashery on the Grasse River in Morley. In the latter half of the century it ran nonstop during

Note 5: Hopkins too had traded in ashes when he founded Hopkinton in 1803. His mercantile successor in 1821, Clark S. Chittenden, built an ashery and began accepting large quantities of ashes from the struggling farmers in exchange for his merchandise (*Potsdam Courier-Freeman* 1952).



The Johnsons' two asheries on both sides of the Grasse River in Morley, near a cooperage, fulling mill, and tannery. From Beers, *New Topographical Atlas of St. Lawrence County, 1865*. Courtesy of Potsdam Public Museum.

the summer busy season (news article in SLCHA Archive, no date). The Morley ashery employed as many as nine men, including teamsters to collect ashes from farmhouses. In the winter, the Johnsons recruited as many as 20 teams to stockpile a surplus to use when the roads were impassable in the muddy spring. The teams collected in a radius up to 18 miles from the ashery. Entrepreneurial boys also fitted their sleds with boxes and collected ashes for spending money (Leonard 1942).

The ash collectors paid homeowners about 12 cents per bushel and added a 5 cent fee to deliver it. The ashery converted that 17-cent bushel to seven or eight pounds of black salts, worth about 24 cents (Chittenden 1979). The Johnsons' main market was Montreal, where they earned from \$100 to \$320 per ton. Even though technological improvements were made in Europe to synthesize potash in 1824, North American potash derived from

ashes remained attractive through the 1860s for its quality and lower price (Chittenden 1979, Hedrick 1933). A ton was fetching \$120 in New York in 1824, \$300 in the 1860s to bolster production during the Civil War (news article, SLCHA Archive, no date).

The U. S. remained the world's largest producer until the 1860s, when potassium chloride quarried from Germany's beds made inroads into the market. The Erie Canal had opened up new forests and sources of potash further west in the 1820s, so New York, already deforested, lost preeminence. The state census in 1855 reported 68 asheries producing 7600 tons of potash, which is less than the north country alone was producing 20 years earlier. Ten towns still advertised asheries in the 1862 *St. Lawrence County Business Directory*. Potash production may have been given a boost in this region in the 1860s by the patenting of an improved method of converting stove ashes to potash by B. F. Jewett of North Bangor (*Fort Covington Sun* 1962) [Note 6]. Elsewhere in the state the potash business was declining. The 1865 census reported only 54 asheries in New York (Van Wagenen 1953). By the 1880s most asheries in the North Country were closed (Horton 1964), although the Johnsons ran their Morley operation for a few more decades (*Fort Covington Sun* 1962). An ashery may have been operating as late as the 1920s near Maxville, Ontario (Chittenden 1979:17).

Sewall Raymond's sandstone shop on Market at Elm remained in the family for over a century. It serves today as a vivid reminder of an early masonry style, early merchant activity, and the strong economic influence of the old potash industry. Memoirs of North Country residents praise the

Note 6: Our source reported that Jewett's patent claimed to produce a higher quality pearlash from house ashes by adding "muck" [mud] to the boiling process. This seems unlikely; muck, meaning mud or peat, added to pearlash made a good fertilizer. We have not checked the original patent.



shopkeepers for accommodating the cash-strapped settlers by accepting farm products such as ashes in exchange for merchandise (e.g., *Potsdam Courier-Freeman* 1952). But those barter years are also remembered as indicative of hardship and isolation. An 1895 editorial in the *Ogdensburg Advance* (1895:1) notes proudly the city's century of accomplishments since the settlement was founded.

We have advanced since then. We are no longer an undiscovered part of the north woods. Our currency is not composed of black salts and pearlsh. . . What an advance . . .! What shall we be a century hence?

*Thanks to Deborah Cady for permission to study and photograph Sewall Raymond's ledger. Thanks to Paul Loucks and Jim Carl for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.*

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# Guarding the Whiskey

Dale Hobson

Old Dan Whitney, my Pa, was always gassing on  
about the Revolution, lost in the glory days  
of the Shrewsbury boys, fighting for God  
and Massachusetts under Captain Andrews.

It was all “the air a-crackle with musket balls  
and hot with the grapeshot.” You’d think he’d lost  
four years and a leg to a poem, instead of a war.  
I never liked the tune, but Luther ate it up with a spoon.

No surprise when he and my cousins mustered in  
with the South Madrid Militia, just as quick  
as Captain Bunnell waved around the bounty.  
Luther was sick of seeing the south end of our mule.

And things were tight, what with the embargo.  
Nothing held a candle to potash for cash money,  
sold downriver to the powder mill in Montreal.  
Too bad it all sailed right back up in Royal gunboats.

You’d think Pa would be quit of old Mad George,  
whose writ still runs just across the river, but no.  
Upper Canada is lousy with unhung Tories, he’d say,  
and by 1813 he thought the matter long past due.

Come October, the harvest was in, but not the snow,  
so it looked as good a time as any to Luther  
to slip across the water and relieve our neighbors  
of anything that wasn’t nailed to the warehouse floor.

With the Fort Wellington crew off chasing the Federals  
headed down to “liberate” Quebec, the coast was clear.  
They came back low in the water with tea, liquor, axheads,  
loose silver, bolts of wool, pelts, sugar, and a mirror for Ma.

A little light on the glory maybe--not many shopkeepers  
will argue with a dozen muskets. It did make a cozy winter.  
But bad comes after good--or after the goods, anyway.  
And Captain Kerr followed the swag that February.

As dour a Scot as ever darkened the continent, and ugly  
as bagpipes before breakfast, leading a score of Royal Marines,  
a gaggle of jumped-up farmboys, and every commandeered  
team and sledge for ten miles round. Seemed a bit warm.

As if words were pounds, he spoke but a single sentence.  
“Load it all up, laddies, else we burn down the town.”  
And they made a proper job of it, being professionals,  
leaving us plucked as a roast goose on the sideboard.

Luther and the hotheads slipped off to harry them home,  
but the Marines made it back to their boats unslaughtered.  
There was some delay concerning a loose barrel of whiskey,  
left by chance (or craft) in the middle of the road.

A stern chase being a long chase, I let the fools get to it.  
Lord knows the only crop a soldier sows is bones, his own  
if no one else’s. Only bones and poems of glory.  
Damn all captains anyway; I’ll be guarding the whiskey.

# The Life and Times of Jay Fairbanks, of Hermon, New York, 1828-1912

Stanley Maine

Reuben Jay Fairbanks turned 37 in February, 1864, while marching north through the Carolinas. Now it was May, and at last the war was over! Although he would stay in the army for two more months, his regiment, part of General Sherman's army, was to parade through Washington. The column, 65,000 men strong, stretched out 15 miles. Their clothes were worn, faded and ripped. General Sherman had told them to wear their campaign uniforms. He also had ordered the men, many of whom were westerners like him, to look sharp marching and put on a show for these easterners. As Sherman looked back on his troops, he saw the glint of their shining muskets and bayonets, a mass of steel. The soldier's strides were long and their step was in unison. The regimental flags were tattered from the rough campaigning.

Jay was proud of what he had done in the war. His company F, 60<sup>th</sup> New York Veteran Volunteers, had become like his family. As First Sergeant, Jay was proud of his company—they were his boys. Washington was the closest he had been to home for 14 months. Recently his thoughts had been on his family in Russell and Hermon, where he hoped to return very soon. But this day his focus was on the parade. As he marched up to the grandstands he was told to keep his gaze 15 feet in front of him, but in his peripheral vision he could see the new president, Andrew Johnson, and Generals Grant and Sherman.

The soldiers had no idea how warmly this Washington crowd would greet them. The throngs lining the streets had thrown so many flowers that the troops were marching ankle deep in them. The adrenalin rush created by the cheering crowds kept the tired

men going until they returned to their camps that night. The boys, now men, would return to their ordinary lives as farmers, mechanics, and businessmen. But none of them would ever feel ordinary again. They had helped save the Union!

I am a great-great grandson of Reuben Jay Fairbanks. My interest in Jay began with a disagreement between my father, Clark Maine, and his sister, Florence Maine Lindsay. Clark said that he remembered Jay in a uniform. That must have been one of his earliest memories, because Clark was only three when Jay died. The uniform was probably Jay's Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) uniform. But Aunt Florence told me that Reuben Jay did not serve in the army; he paid someone to fight for him. (This practice of substitution was established later in the war. The man who was drafted could pay a \$300.00 commutation fee to avoid service.) As you will see, the records that I have found show Jay to have been in the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Jay enlisted almost two years before it was even necessary to get a substitute—the draft was not instituted until July, 1863.

Aunt Florence always told me that the Fairbanks family was "well to do." My research suggests that, as pioneers, Jay's parents were struggling to make a life. Jay's children, on the other hand, became successful businessmen, farmers, teachers, medical doctors, and factory managers.

Research for this article is based on family stories, newspaper articles, and Jay's military and pension files from the National Archives. The events of Jay's life have been augmented by material from county histories, Civil War histories, and the Fairbanks genealogy.



## Early Settlement in Hermon

Jay was born Reuben Jay Fairbanks, February 7, 1828, in Norfolk, New York, the second son of seven children by Oshea and Mehitable Powers Fairbanks. Oshea was a descendant of Jonathan Fairbanks of Dedham, Massachusetts, who arrived in Boston on the ship "The Speedwell" in 1632. Successive Fairbanks ancestors lived in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont.

Within two years of their marriage in 1824, Oshea and Mehitable, accompanied by Oshea's brother Daniel, moved to West Hermon, at that time part of Edwards township. Land prices were becoming expensive in Vermont and the land agents were promising cheap land in Northern New York. The family story is that Oshea moved the family and all their possessions from Vermont by oxen and a wagon. They came over Lake Champlain during the winter, probably through Chateaugay, then along the Military Turnpike, then possibly through Potsdam, Canton and Gouverneur.

Oshea and his family were among the first settlers in the Hermon area. His brother Daniel, who remained unmarried, lived in the household. Daniel bought land in Hermon from James Bolton on September 5, 1834. The land was virgin woods and had to be cleared before farming could begin. The Fairbanks probably resided the first few years in a log hut and then maybe a log cabin. The daily workload must have been terribly difficult, because the first few years they would have had to clear the land of trees and burn them. They leached the ashes of the burnt trees with water to produce potash and sold it to agents as their first cash crop. Then they could plant around the stumps until they had the time to pull out the stumps. West Hermon is a rock-filled landscape, but the soil between the rocks is excellent for farming. The brothers' first crops were corn, potatoes

and wheat. They may also have raised cows or sheep at first, as most other early subsistence farmers did, but the census records to confirm that are lost. The sheep would have been for wool to be homespun and woven into clothing.

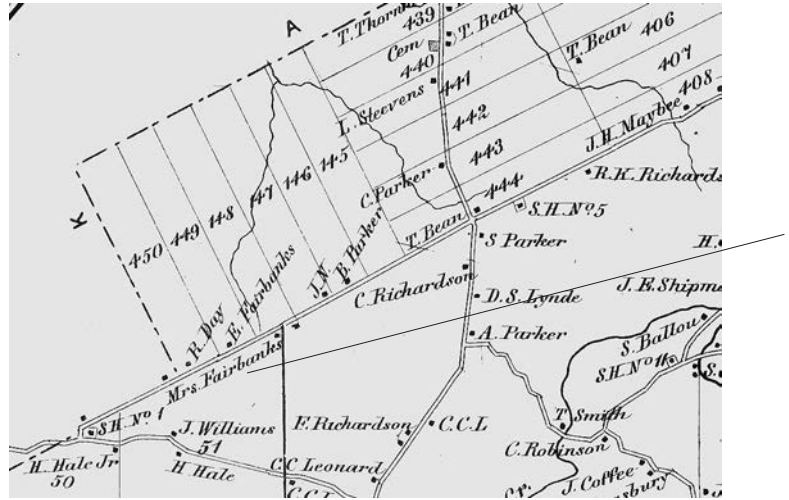


Figure 1: The northwestern part of the town of Hermon (West Hermon) showing Fairbanks' parcels. E. Fairbanks is Reuben Jay's older brother Emmett. From Beers' Atlas of St. Lawrence County, 1865, compact disk by David Martin.

Life seems to have been hard for the Fairbanks—and not always peaceful. The Ogdensburg paper, *The St. Lawrence Republican*, reported in May, 1843 that Oshea was convicted in court of assault and battery on one of his teenage sons and was sent to jail for four months. I have not been able to find out whether it was Reuben Jay he beat. Oshea must have returned home for a while, because a daughter, Venerie, was born in June, 1844.

But he was evidently not happy there. Soon after the gold rush of 1849 began, Oshea left home for California. Other adventurers from the Hermon area went west then also. Some returned, but not Oshea. He disappears from the New York and California records. His granddaughter, Florence Fairbanks Maine, my great-grandmother wrote that she had no idea when or where he died. Jay's older brothers Henry and Clark went west also, to find their father, but apparently they didn't succeed. They

then settled in California, and their descendants are there still.

Being the oldest left at home, Reuben Jay would have had to take care of his mother and the younger children for a few years, but that didn't prevent him from marrying. In 1852, when he was 24, he married Harriet Eggleston, the eldest daughter of Samuel Eggleston, who had moved from Antwerp, in Jefferson County, to the Marshville area of Hermon (Figure 2). The newlyweds probably stayed with or near one of their parents for a few years, because they owned no land.

In 1860 Jay and Harriet bought land in the town of Russell. They were farmers just trying to survive by raising all the food they needed and selling any extra crops to pay for what they could not grow. It is most likely Jay traded carpentry work with his neighbors. He declared in his military enrollment papers in 1861 that he was a carpenter. Harriet bore four children in their first eight years, two of whom were living when Jay went off to war.

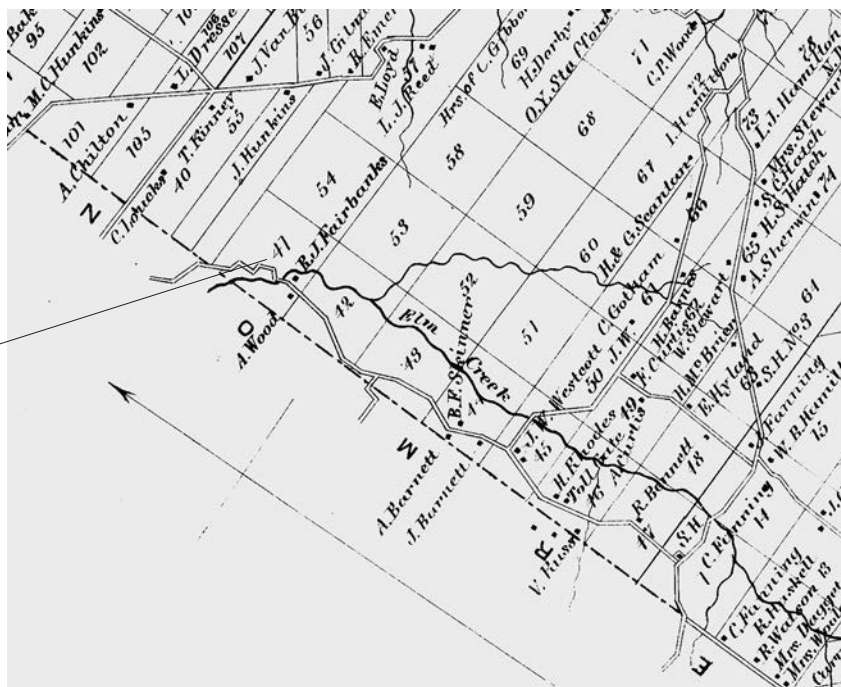


Figure 2: A portion of the Town of Russell. Jay's farm is just above and to the left of center, in parcel 41. His road leads into Marshville, about one mile away, and then to Hermon. From Beers' Atlas of St. Lawrence County, 1865, compact disk by David Martin.

## The Civil War years

In 1860-1861 the nation was beginning to boil with the problem of slavery, and the South threatened separation from the Union. It is unclear if Jay was politically-minded at all, but one must assume that he was interested in the problems of his nation. I can't determine whether he was a Democrat or Republican, but most farmers in the area were members of the newly-formed Republican Party. There is no indication what Jay thought of the slavery issue. Some in the county were abolitionists, but many had no opinion. Most were just trying to survive and raise their families. When Fort Sumter was fired upon in April, 1861, Harriet was pregnant with their second daughter. Jay may have been in turmoil over the nation's problem, but he didn't sign up in the first rush to arms.

When he was younger, Jay had served in the local militia, as shown in the Hermon militia lists. The militia mustered one day a year and every able-bodied man was expected to show up for training, or it cost him money. Men who did show up were paid 50 cents for their trouble. The day was more of a picnic than a military training day. Officers were elected and the men marched about. The women provided a big dinner, maybe a few alcoholic drinks were consumed, and then everybody went home. In the few years before the war more thought may have been given to training, but still the men didn't know much about military ways.

After the Battle of Bull Run in July, 1861, the nation began to realize what a terrible war it was involved in. President Lincoln called for another 75,000 volunteers. One of the regiments being raised was the 33<sup>rd</sup> New York Militia, soon to be known as the 60<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Regiment. On October 1<sup>st</sup> 1861, Captain Thomas Elliott came to



*Figure 3: Studio photo of Thomas Elliott, captain of Co. F, 60th New York Volunteer Infantry, the man who recruited Jay Fairbanks. Internet photo.*

Russell to recruit for that regiment (Figure 3). Jay enlisted with him and traveled to Ogdensburg for training camp. He left a pregnant Harriet at home with two small children and a farm. Uncle Daniel was still in the area, so I conclude that he offered to take care of Harriet and the children. Before he enlisted, on July 23, 1861, Jay sold his farm to his Uncle Daniel. Perhaps this land exchange was in case something should happen to him in the army.

Jay enrolled with the 60<sup>th</sup> on October 12 and was mustered in to federal service October 31, 1861, for three years in Company F. He entered as a sergeant, a non-commissioned officer who helped to run the company, so he must have had some military aptitude. He was able to read and write, which was one of the requirements of a sergeant. The regiment trained at Ogdensburg's Camp Wheeler. The sergeants took roll call each morning and led the squads in their daily work in camp. On November 1, 1861, Jay and his regiment left Ogdensburg on the train, traveling east towards Rouses Point. The train consisted of two engines pulling 26 cars. The first four carried baggage, the fifth carried the Colonel, his staff, and the regimental band. Company F with 89 men filled the twelfth



*Figure 4: Portrait of Elisha R. Turner of Macomb, showing the uniform that Jay would also have worn. Elisha was also a member of Company F, 60th New York Volunteer Infantry. His uniform bears a white star, indicating membership in the white star division (2nd) of the 12th Corps. Internet photo.*

and thirteenth cars. At Rouses Point Jay and his men boarded a Lake Champlain steamer to the southern end of the lake, transferred to a canal boat, and floated to Albany, where they stayed the night. They re-boarded a steamship and went to New York City. There the colonel received the regimental flag. The enlistees began to notice what a difference there was in the food and accommodations between officers and enlisted men. For example, the colonel stayed in nice quarters and left the regiment to sleep in a park under the stars.

From New York City Jay's regiment traveled to Washington D. C., then north to the Baltimore area. Its first assignment was to guard the railway line between Washington and Baltimore. Soon it was assigned to guard the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The regiment was split up into



three or four groups and assigned guard duty over bridges and culverts. The rebel guerillas could interrupt the railroads' busy transportation of daily supply needs of the Army by destroying these bridges. This was a much-needed duty but the regiment found it boring. Many could not wait to get to the battlefields, although they probably had no idea what they were in for.

The camp life consisted of guarding the railway, drilling in infantry tactics, and more drilling. Jay was immediately assigned to help build a barracks for his section of the regiment, probably because he had stated his occupation as a carpenter when he enlisted. In their spare time the men conducted a little sightseeing, and some companies had libraries and debate societies. There were always card games and writing home [see "Sergeant Crane of the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment," *SLCHA Quarterly* 52(3), 2007]. Since Jay knew how to write, I'm sure he wrote home often, but I don't know of any letters that survived.

While guarding the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Jay was accidentally shot in the cheek by a boy who was hunting robins. He consulted a doctor, but there is no record that he was hospitalized. The rest of his life he had a beard, so perhaps that covered up a scar.

### **Early Military Engagements**

In June the regiment was brought together and sent to Harper's Ferry. There they got their first taste of combat. Stonewall Jackson's command in the Shenandoah Valley came up to Harper's Ferry and threatened their garrison's flanks. As it turned out, Jackson was just using this tactic to keep the garrison from moving south to re-enforce McClelland.

That summer the regiment was hit hard by a different type of enemy. Typhoid fever spread through the regiment. At one point the regiment was taken out of active service and sent to White Sulfur Springs, Virginia, a resort situated near a sulfur springs. There

the men's health gradually improved. For Second Battle of Bull Run the regiment was moved back to join Pope's Army. They were in support position during the battle and joined in the retreat.

On Sept 5, Jay was sent to a Washington D.C. hospital, sick with "chronic diarrhea." While he was in the hospital his regiment fought in the Battle of Antietam, on September 17, 1862. On October 10, he returned to the regiment, which was at Harper's Ferry again, sometimes advancing into enemy territory. Sanitary conditions must have remained poor, because once again his sickness returned. On December 10 he was in Harper's Ferry 12<sup>th</sup> Corps Hospital, and remained there when his regiment was sent to the Fredericksburg area under General Burnside's command. Jay did not recover quickly. He was back in camp sometime in January, 1863, and had one more bout with sickness in early March. The regiment by then was reassigned to the Army of the Potomac, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, under General Henry Slocum, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division under General John Geary. Jay's regiment had only a supporting role in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Then they took part in the frustrating "Mud March," attempting an end-sweep around the Confederate lines but bogging down in the thawing roads when the weather turned warm. After that the regiment went into winter quarters near Aquia Creek, Virginia.

That winter, the Army of the Potomac changed its commander again, this time to General Joseph Hooker. General Hooker rebuilt the Army's confidence and introduced corps badges. The 12th Corps' badge was a star. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's badge became a white star. The winter weather must have been hard on the soldiers, but they were kept busy with training and just gathering the necessities that were needed to keep an army alive.

On April 27, 1863 the Army started out from Stafford's Courthouse to try to march around the flank of General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. They marched west,

crossed the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers and marched through the Wilderness area of Virginia, near Fredericksburg. That part of the campaign was a success. Unfortunately, then everything began to fall apart. Hooker's men encountered a little opposition and Hooker drew them back into defensive formations. The 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment faced some skirmishing on May 1, part of Lee's design to distract the Army of the Potomac while Stonewall Jackson's corps swung around to the Union army's right.

At 4:00 p.m. Stonewall's men smashed into the army's right flank and demolished the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps. The 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, containing the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment, then became the army's right flank, exposed to the enemy. Darkness set in and Stonewall stopped his army to wait until morning. In the night he was mistakenly shot by his own men. The next day the Army of Northern Virginia continued its assault on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps. Hooker decided to withdraw his troops to an even more compact formation. Unfortunately, the 60<sup>th</sup> missed these orders and were left almost surrounded by the enemy. They fought their way out but lost many a soldier. On May 6 they moved back over the Rappahannock River with the rest of the army to its camps around Stafford's Courthouse and Aquia Creek. With that, the Battle of Chancellorsville was over. It was a huge victory for Lee's Confederate army.

The Battle of Chancellorsville was Jay's first real taste of battle. A few in his Company F were killed, and his Captain, Thomas Elliott, was captured, so the company must have been deeply involved in the action. Elliott was sent to Richmond, then after a prisoner exchange he rejoined his company in June.

### **The 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Gettysburg**

That June, 1863, Lee's army began its second invasion of the North. The Army of the Potomac attempted to stay between Washington and where it thought Lee was. All

this maneuvering ended up at Gettysburg.

The 12th Corps, with Jay's regiment, arrived at Gettysburg about 4:00 in the afternoon of July 1, after most of the fighting for the day had ended. Early the next day Geary's division was moved to Culp's Hill on the extreme right of the Union Army. The 60<sup>th</sup> was posted on the left of the division at the top of the hill (near the current park observation tower). They immediately started building breastworks using stones, logs and dirt. By 9:30 a.m. they were settled in to wait for any Confederate attack.

All was quiet until about 4:00 p.m. when the Confederates started a cannonade from a hill to the northeast of Culp's Hill. It was soon quieted by return battery fire. Included in the return fire was Knapp's battery of Pennsylvania Artillery, posted next to the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment. When some of the battery soldiers were killed or injured, men of the 60<sup>th</sup> shifted over to help with the cannons.

Things quieted down again on Jay's right side of the battlefield while the battle raged on the Union left in the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield, and Little Roundtop. It was so dicey over that way that General Meade decided to reinforce the left with the 12th Corps. Because of its position, Greene's brigade containing the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment was instructed to stay on the top of Culp's Hill. In the evening, after the rest of the corps had withdrawn to support the Union left, Greene was stretching out his troops to try to cover as much as possible of the top of the hill when the Confederate division of Alleghany Johnson attacked the hill. Four thousand of Johnson's men attacked in the dusk against about 1350 men in Greene's brigade. The attackers were delayed by the skirmish line long enough that it was nearly dark by the time they were able to threaten the position defended by the 60<sup>th</sup>, on the far left of the Regiment at the steepest part of the hill.

If you read accounts from the Confederates you would think that they were attacking up a huge mountain. Culp's is not an easy hill to run up while being fired upon, but it is not a mountain. The hill was littered with boulders

that provided cover for attacking soldiers. The hill was also covered by a canopy of leaves, making dusk fall earlier so the attacking soldiers were even more difficult to see. The Union soldiers reported later that they fired at the flashes of the opposing guns. Still, the Confederate troops attacked without success four times.

When the fighting was over that night, the Confederate troops were within a few hundred yards of the Baltimore Pike, the potential escape route of the Army of the Potomac. They were also within a few hundred yards of the Army's artillery reserve. They also outnumbered the Union troops in the area. They did not know any of these facts, because darkness obscured all. Overnight, however, the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps returned to Culp's Hill and the threat on the Union's right was minimized. Unfortunately, the Confederates hadn't learned this fact either. The next the



*Figure 5: Abel Godard, Colonel of the 60th New York Infantry. He led the 60th from the Battle of Gettysburg until the capture of Atlanta. Abel was the son of Harlow Godard, of Richville, New York. Internet photo.*

morning at 3:30 the Union counter-attacked, beginning with a cannonade followed by charges of the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps. The Confederates still had plenty of fight left in them, and they too had been reinforced during the night. They charged on the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment's position a few times, but were repulsed every time. By 10:30 that morning the rebels were driven back across Rock Creek. Except for some sharpshooting, the fighting on that side of the battlefield was over. In the middle of the line, Pickett's charge on the Union lines would soon take place. The only activity on the right side of the Union line was some overshot cannon shells that fell among the regiment.

Many Confederate soldiers lay dead on the field, and many were captured and wounded. Hundreds of rebel guns were picked up. In the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment 18 were killed and 34 were wounded but recovered. Our Reuben Jay from Russell was slightly wounded in the thigh but didn't require hospitalization. The woods in front of the brigade were so shot up with lead that many of the trees would later die. Some of the smaller trees were completely cut down. The 60<sup>th</sup> stayed in Gettysburg until noon of July 4 and then started out trying to catch Lee's Army. Some men were detailed to bury the dead.

The Culp's Hill part of the Gettysburg battle has been lost in the hype over Little Round Top and Pickett's charge. The superb defensive battle that General Greene waged on Culp's Hill saved the right side of the Union line. If Meade had been allowed to pull the whole 12<sup>th</sup> Corps to the left (or if Greene had been defeated) the rebels would have been allowed to walk right into the rear of the Union line and no doubt the battle's outcome would have been different. Pickett's famous charge would not have been needed. General Meade's Union army could have been forced to withdraw towards Baltimore, and he might have had to fight his way out. Without Culp's Hill (including Reuben Jay's 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment) Gettysburg would not have been the important victory that it became to our nation.



## **Lookout Mountain, Tennessee**

After failing to trap Lee at the Potomac River, the Union Army returned to Virginia. There was a little skirmishing but no pitched battles. Reuben Jay Fairbanks was promoted to first sergeant of Company F. The first sergeant is the captain's righthand man, the one who implements captain's orders in camp and in battle.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Corps along with the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps were then sent to Chattanooga in late September, 1863, to help General Grant lift the siege of Chattanooga by Confederate General Braxton Bragg. The two corps, totaling about 20,000 men, were marched to a railroad and conveyed to the Nashville, Tennessee, vicinity in 12 days. Quite a feat for that time!

At Nashville the 60<sup>th</sup> was at first assigned to guard railroads, then ordered to march with the rest of their corps to Chattanooga to secure a shorter route for supplies for that city. The 60<sup>th</sup> was dropped off to guard a railway crossing in Bridgeport, Tennessee. The rest of their division, General Geary's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, was marched to Wehatchie, Tennessee, in the shadow of Lookout Mountain, where in late October it repulsed a night attack by General Longstreet's Confederate troops.

For the next month, Union and Confederate soldiers sparred across Lookout Creek. Nearby, the steep Lookout Mountain loomed over the city of Chattanooga and all that surrounds it. The Confederacy had artillery on the mountain, and garrisons with defensive breastworks. As long as the rebels held the mountain, almost everything the Union army did was known to the Confederate command.

It was a standing joke by the Union soldiers that "one fine morning" General Hooker would order a charge up Lookout Mountain to capture the garrison there. It was more than a joke: General Grant, then in command of the armies of the region, told Hooker that he should make a "demonstration" to take the mountain.

A demonstration is a military tactic using part of an army to attack on one side of the battlefield, usually to disguise a larger attack on another side. Hooker took it upon himself and his 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, which included Jay's 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment, to take the mountain.

On the morning of November 24 General John Geary's division was told to march south, cross Lookout Creek, and attack up the mountain in order to take the garrison on the plateau below the summit. Unlike Culp's Hill, this was indeed a mountain, and the Southerners had constructed formidable breastworks. The breastworks faced straight down the mountain, but the path that Geary's division followed brought them to clash with the enemy at its flank. Colonel Ireland's brigade, containing the 60<sup>th</sup>, was on the right of the division and plowed right into the Confederates on that plateau just below the peak. Ireland's brigade drove the enemy off the mountainside and into the woods by noon, when the division was told to stop and hold their position there overnight. In the morning they discovered that the rebels had abandoned the mountain. The division then consumed most of the day to get to Missionary Ridge. They attacked on the right of the ridge. This was the final nail in the Confederates' coffin, forcing them to give up that ridge and lifting the siege of Chattanooga. This battle ended the rebels' control over the important city of Chattanooga for the rest of the war.

Hooker's Corps was ordered to follow the rebels as they retreated but was successfully stopped at Ringgold Gap in another sharp battle in which the 60<sup>th</sup> lost more killed and wounded.

Back at Lookout Mountain, the 60<sup>th</sup> had suffered 5 killed and 35 wounded, including our Jay Fairbanks. He was wounded in both hips by a gunshot wound and probably lay on the battlefield for quite some time until he was picked up and examined by the regimental surgeons. He was taken to a field hospital first, then carried by train to a hospital at Tullahoma, Tennessee, where he stayed until he recovered. The wound must have missed the bone but was still



quite debilitating, because the lead ball was a half-inch in diameter. The *Potsdam Courier Freeman* listed Jay as seriously wounded. I wonder if Harriet and Jay's parents were notified before this news was published. He had many weeks of bed rest and entertained himself by carving rings out of beef and mule bones. Some were quite intricate. Many of these rings he kept until his death. Where are they now?

### **A Visit Home**

During his hospital stay Jay informed his superiors that he intended to re-enlist with the rest of the regiment. General Grant wanted to keep some of the older regiments together instead of constantly forming new untried regiments. To the soldiers in the regiments that re-enlisted as a whole unit he offered a \$300 bonus as well as a month leave in their hometowns. These regiments were then designated as Veteran Regiments. If enough men re-enlisted to preserve the fighting strength of the regiment, it qualified for these favors. I can only guess why Jay decided to re-enlist. The bonus was large for that time. The letters home from other soldiers in the regiment ["Sergeant Crane of the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment," *SLCHA Quarterly* 52(3), 2007] reveal that many in the regiment wanted to stay in the army and finish their job of defeating the rebellion.

Jay stayed in the hospital at Tullahoma, Tennessee until February, 1864. That month, in Stevenson, Alabama, where the regiment was stationed for the winter, Jay re-enlisted for three years. His regiment had already traveled home to St. Lawrence County and had returned with some new recruits, so Jay set off alone by train on April 6. It must have been a joyous reunion with his family. He saw his daughter Harriet for the first time and was reunited with his older children, Florence and Richmond. His mother, Hetty, was still in the Hermon area, living in his brother Emmett's home. His brother Alden was also home from the Army. Alden had

served his term with the 16<sup>th</sup> Regiment and had also been wounded. He had mustered out the previous spring.

During his leave, Jay bought and sold land to consolidate his farm in Russell. In May he signed a land contract for acreage near the Hermon line. He also received land from his Uncle Daniel, now age 60, in return for taking care of Daniel for the rest of his life. Earlier that year his wife Harriet, perhaps short on cash, had sold some of the land to Daniel.

The time came too soon to go back to the regiment in Alabama. It must have been a sad day in May when he had to don his uniform and board the train at DeKalb Junction to return to the war zone.

### **With Sherman in the Deep South**

Soon after Jay's return, the Commanding General, William Sherman, launched his Atlanta Campaign. The army marched and fought almost daily from mid-May until September 1, when Slocum's Corps marched into Atlanta. Jay's wound must have been healed well because the regiment was very much involved in this fighting. They had many soldiers killed, with many more wounded. They were sharply engaged at Dallas, Golgatha Crossing, Pine Mountain and Kennesaw Mountain.

Jay's regiment spent the following few months collecting supplies and guarding Atlanta. Then it was chosen to join Sherman in his famous "March to the Sea." They started out of Atlanta on November 15, 1864, arriving in Savannah on December 10.

It has been written that this march wantonly destroyed farms and fields, but the chief targets of Sherman's army were the factories and other infrastructure that supported the Southern armies. When the soldiers saw bloodhound tracking dogs, they killed them. They had learned about the prison at Andersonville and were in no mood to see these dogs used to hunt escaped prisoners.

When the Army got to Savannah it had to connect with supplies arriving by ship. It captured Fort McAllaster and thus was reunited with its supply lines. By Christmas, the city of Savannah also fell. Jay's 60th Regiment moved into the city and was assigned to control the city. Jay reportedly brought back some cloth from one of the factories that was burned. This was made into a seat cover on a chair that his grandson, my grandfather Carroll Maine, owned.

By the end of January, 1865, the regiment was on the move again. They joined up with Sherman's army in its march north through the Carolinas. The army's mood changed in South Carolina. The soldiers wanted to punish that state for starting the rebellion. Many houses were burnt for no reason except that they were in the path of the army.

The army faced many obstacles to traverse. In its "March to the Sea" in Georgia it had followed rivers, but in its return north through the Carolinas it had to cross rivers and wade through many swamps. In spite of this, it covered 20 miles a day. Enemy resistance was also an obstacle. In late March, General Joseph Johnston attacked

Slocum's Corps, containing the 60<sup>th</sup>, at Bentonville, North Carolina. Although the 60<sup>th</sup> wasn't deeply involved, the corps was able to hold off the rebels until it was backed up by General Howard. The Union then moved on to Raleigh, North Carolina, and there the war ended with the surrender of Johnston in April, 1865.

Jay's regiment marched to Washington by way of Richmond and took part in the second day of the Great Parade in Washington. Then they were stationed at Alexandria, Virginia. As a sergeant, Jay's work would have been clerical, keeping track of the troop lists as soldiers joined his regiment from other units being mustered out. At Alexandria, he was promoted to Second Lieutenant on June 23, 1865. This was a brevet, or temporary, promotion; Jay was no doubt doing the job of a second lieutenant, but he never received the pay of one. On July 17 the war department mustered out Jay and the rest of the 60<sup>th</sup> and transported them back to Ogdensburg, New York. They paraded through that city and were then dismissed from service. Most of the regiment went back to their hometowns and farms.



*Left: A daguerreotype of Reuben Jay Fairbanks, taken about 1875. The daguerreotype was an old technology by then, but other clues point to that date. For example, his beard is getting a little grey. The photo of Harriett, Jay's wife, right, is about the same date as Jay's. Photos from author's collection.*

## The Veteran's Life in Russell

After what must have been an emotional family reunion, Jay returned to his farm on the Hermon-Edwards road. He was able to make a living at farming. The land is rocky, but not as bad as the West Hermon area of his childhood. Elm Creek flows through the farm, so it has a good source of water. The railroads were active then, so it is quite possible that Jay made butter using the milk from his farm. Later that century he might have carted raw milk to some of the local cheese factories that dotted the area.

His family had grown by one during the time he was gone. Nine months after his leave in April, 1864, a daughter was born. Upon his return, Jay's family continued to grow, with the addition of another daughter and four sons between 1866 and 1877. Harriet bore a total of 11 children, nine of whom survived to adulthood.

Their children gave them reason to be proud. Their daughter Florence married Elgin Maine, a carpenter and sawmill owner (and

my great-grandfather). Their son Richmond Jay became one of the most successful businessmen in the Hermon area. Daughter Cynthia and granddaughters Mildred and Grace graduated from Potsdam Normal Teachers College. Cynthia and her husband moved to Minnesota, but came back a few years later to operate a hardware store in Hermon, co-owned with Richmond Jay. Daughter Harriet married a doctor, David J. Culver. Sons Perry and Roger moved to the Waterloo, Iowa area and started families there. Daughter Ina and her husband for a while managed the farm of the Prince of Wales in Calgary, Alberta. Son Clark went on to medical school. He enlisted as a doctor in the Medical Corps during World War I. The youngest child, Leroy, was a manager of cheese factories.

Jay's mother Mehitabel (Hettie), who raised her children without much help from their father, died at age 79. Uncle Daniel had died a few years earlier, at 74, after being gored by a bull. For nearly 50 years Daniel,



*Reuben Jay and Harriet Fairbanks (middle) on their porch with various sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Photo from author's collection.*





*The Veterans of the 60th Regiment at the dedication of General George Sears Greene's Monument, September 27, 1907, at Culp's Hill on the battlefield of Gettysburg. Reuben Jay is the white-bearded man third from left in the second row of seated veterans. Photo from SLCHA archives.*

who never married, was a valuable helper to Hettie and to Harriet when their men were away

When he was 71, Reuben Jay and Harriet sold their farm to Richmond Jay and moved into the village of Hermon to reside with him. A few years later the farmhouse, which Richmond had rented out, burned down.

In 1902 Jay and Harriet celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Theirs was quite a large gathering at either Richmond's home or the Hermon Hotel.

Harriet developed Bright's disease and died on April 23, 1905. She must have been a strong-willed person, because she had to take care of the household while Jay was in the army for almost four years. Even with help from Uncle Daniel, other kin and neighbors, Harriet's burden must have been

overwhelming at times. She and many other wives like her are among the unsung heroes of the Civil War.

As early as 1875 Jay applied for and received a pension from the government for his gunshot wound in the hip. His daughter Florence's father-in-law, Clark Maine, a Justice of the Peace, helped Jay complete his pension application. According to his pension papers, a physician's report was not needed. He received three dollars a month—not enough to live on, but maybe enough to have the wound tended occasionally. As the veteran pension laws changed, Jay would reapply for a larger pension. In 1885 he reapplied and was granted \$10 per month. By 1907, at age 79, he applied for an invalid's pension of \$20 per month. He probably got that one, because it was based on his age.

Jay was probably a member of the Rice Post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and participated in its meetings and ceremonies. On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, 1888, he is listed as one of the veterans who returned to the battlefield. He was very patriotic and on all good weather days he flew the American flag.

Jay was active in his regiment's reunions, returning again to Gettysburg for the dedication of General Greene's statue in September, 1907. On another trip he visited Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, for the dedication of the New York Peace Monument. At 78, he was one of the oldest veterans at the dedication. Some of the younger veterans carried him up the mountain to the place where he was wounded. Revisiting the site of these memories after 45 years must have been quite an emotional time.

Jay retained his musket from his service. He had paid the government six dollars for it when he mustered out. It hung over his fireplace and then over his grandson's (Worth Fairbanks') fireplace until well into the 1960s. Jay also preserved a collection of other Civil War artifacts, including his cartridge box and his belt. In his retirement, he wore his GAR uniform proudly and was seen walking about Hermon daily.

In retirement Jay was involved in the affairs of the village of Hermon. When a rail spur was built between Dekalb Junction and Hermon in 1906, Jay was asked to drive the last "golden" spike. The spike was actually copper, but the honor was as good as gold. Declining help with the sledge, Jay gave a demonstration of buck and wing dancing, and was quoted as saying,

I'm as supple as an eel. Now, I'll tell you why I am strong. When I was young I had to hustle for myself. I was turned out to grass when I was eight years old. I never drank whiskey, used little tobacco and minded my own business. You can't get to the top of the ladder without starting at the bottom.

By Christmas 1910 he was listed as one of the "older citizens of Hermon" who could ride the train for free. His daughter Cynthia had many of his old friends over to celebrate his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday in February, 1911.

Jay passed away on August 15, 1912, at age 83, one of the oldest and best-known residents of the Hermon-Russell area. He was buried in Hermon Cemetery next to his wife, Harriet. Their simple headstones are situated in the old part of the cemetery behind son Richmond Fairbanks' big monument.

This story of Reuben Jay Fairbanks is one of a simple beginning but like many of his generation, he helped develop this North Country and he played a role in national affairs by fighting to preserve the union. Jay and Harriet raised a large family of successful farmers, teachers, mechanics, doctors, and businessmen. His accomplishments continue to affect the lives of people today.

*Thanks to David Martin for scanning the photographs*

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