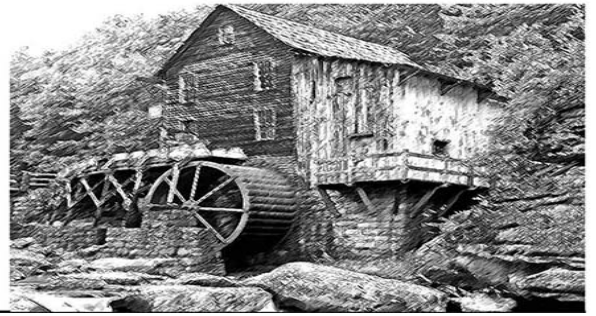


The Gristmill

Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

Summer 2020

The Traveling Banjo

By Karen Staulters,
Town of Milton Historian

On June 28, 2019, I was contacted by Michael Jordan from Cleveland, Ohio. He had just recently purchased an antique Banjo Clock at a local auction. The clock was in good condition and it still worked. He wanted to find out the approximate date of the clock.

This was no ordinary antique clock, as it had an inscription on the back of it which was of historical significance. What I later learned through my research was that before the clock went to auction, it was offered to Brookside Museum, but they did not have the funds to purchase it. The Inscription on the back reads: "Bequest of Mrs. Elizabeth Mary Robertson who died Sep 1/81 at Ballston Spa, NY. Daughter of Danl. D. Benedict deceased of Saratoga Springs, NY. Mrs. Henry A. Mann, Ballston Spa, NY."

Daniel D.(Davis) Benedict was born October 19, 1788 on Court House Hill in the Town of Ballston, Saratoga County. He was son of Levi Benedict (1761-1839) and Elizabeth Davis (1772-1854). He moved to Saratoga Springs in 1811. He was known as a man of character and was employed in positions of trust and responsibility. He worked in the offices of the Congress Hall, the United States Hotel, Union Hall and the railroad offices in Saratoga Springs and Schenectady. He was also a Vestryman of the Bethesda Episcopal Church for many years.

On Feb. 2, 1811, Daniel married Phoebe Hedges in Saratoga Springs. They had four children together, Elizabeth Mary, Levi Stevens, Roswell Gardinier and Charles Oscar.

As he was a prominent member of the community, he started writing a daily diary in 1819 which he continued up until his death in 1866. These diaries became known as the Daniel D. Benedict Diaries which are considered a wealth of historical information around the Saratoga Springs area. Thinking there may be mention of the clock in his diaries, I read the whole collection and there was no mention of it. His daughter, Elizabeth Mary Robertson had these diaries published in *The Saratogian* newspaper shortly before she died in 1881.

In 1821, the United States Hotel was opened by Ford and Benedict. Did the clock hang here?

In 1831, the bathhouse at the Hamilton Spring in Saratoga Springs was kept by the family of Daniel D. Benedict



The Banjo Clock

and at the time he was also a bookkeeper at the United States Hotel. Did the clock hang at the bathhouse? No way to know.

Daniel was the first receiver of tickets for the Schenectady Saratoga Railroad that opened in 1832. Did the clock hang in the railroad station? There are no pictures to confirm this. The diary stated that the railroad depot burned down in 1843, which the clock probably would not have survived the fire.

The diaries also mentioned that the United States Hotel had a great fire on August 17, 1865 which one might conclude that the clock may have been destroyed in the fire if it was there at all. It could have hung in Congress Hall, but that still doesn't date the clock.

I then went searching for Daniel's daughter, Elizabeth Mary (Benedict) Robertson. When she died, she was known as Mary Elizabeth Robertson. She was the last surviving member of Daniel's family as none of her

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Banjo

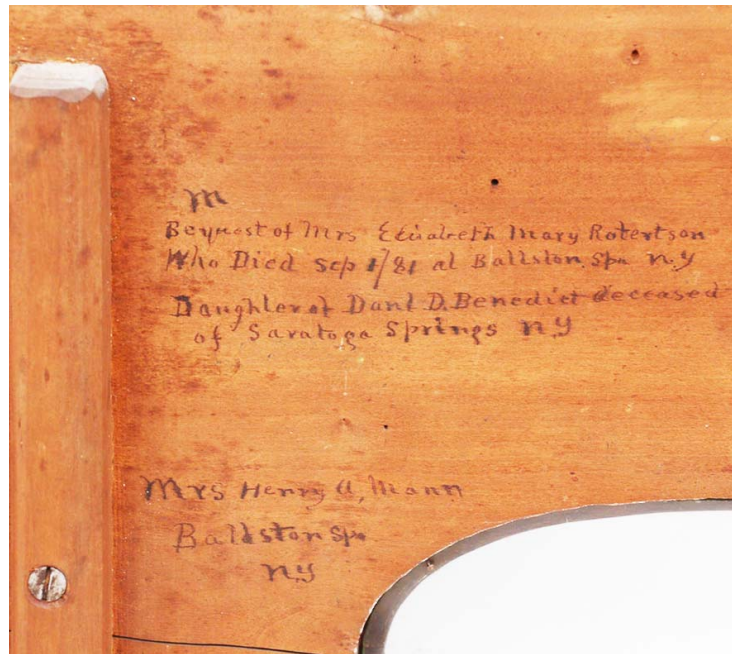
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brothers or she had left any descendants. She was born February 25, 1811 in Saratoga Springs and died suddenly on September 1, 1881 in Ballston Spa. She probably inherited the clock when her father died in 1866. There was no inventory at the Saratoga County Surrogate Court Office for her father, Daniel D. Benedict.

Mary married John B. Robertson and moved "west" to the Rochester area. In 1858, her husband was on trial for trying to kill her. He was accused of trying to purchase poison from a doctor of which to kill her with. Mary had had an accident with a carriage where her leg had been injured and she was not in the best of health. She claimed at the trial that "he would never try to hurt her." He was acquitted as there was no witness to the purchase of the poison and it was believed to be a setup. Her father was still alive at this point, so it is doubtful that the clock hung in her home in Rochester. Shortly after this, her husband quickly vanished.

After this event, she moved back to the Ballston Spa area and became good friends with Matilda Mann (Mrs. Henry A. Mann, Sr.). Henry Augustus Mann Sr. was son of James Mann (1792-1873) and Abigail Hedges (1798-1882). Henry Mann, Sr. was born January 23, 1823 in Ballston Spa, NY and died April 24, 1892 in the same place and is buried in the Ballston Spa Village Cemetery. Matilda Jones married Henry Mann on Jan. 1, 1848 and they had five children: Henry A. Jr.; James R.; William T.; Edward J.; and Ella M. Henry Mann, Sr. was county treasurer for many years and had a large farm on Mann Road. Mary Robertson and Matilda were friends and may have been distantly related. Matilda died Dec. 28, 1914 at the age of 92.

It is noted that her son, Henry A. Jr. was a very successful businessman who worked in connection with Ho-



Inscription on Banjo Clock

race Medberry at the Glenn Paper Collar Works. He also invented a machine for making envelopes, but later inventions further perfected the process. He was working for several years in the paper business in Albany and later went to Troy and patented the process for waterproofing linen collars. Not long after that, he moved to New York City and remained there in this business until his death.

Mary Robertson had died September 1, 1881 as the inscription on the back of the clock indicates. I went searching at the Saratoga County Surrogate Court and in the records of Elizabeth Mary Robertson, Matilda Mann is mentioned as receiving "one clock" along with all her "other furniture, beds and bedding". Matilda also received \$200 and her husband Henry Mann received a gold chain. Mary's husband, John B. Robertson, is listed as "location unknown", despite documented efforts to locate him. The "one clock" listed may be the one in question.



In further research I found that Matilda and Henry's son, William T. had moved to Cleveland, Ohio by 1900 and was living in a rooming house there. He was single and was 44 years old at the time. And in 1910 and 1920, he is still living in Cleveland and is a hardware salesman. He moved back to Ballston Spa in 1924. In the 1925 New York State Census he is listed living with his brother James in Ballston Spa. He remained in Ballston Spa until his death in 1939. But what happened to the clock?

If you recall, our story started with a man calling from Cleveland, Ohio who had just purchased the clock at auction. One could presume that Matilda Mann gave the clock to her son William when he moved to Cleveland, Ohio and there it stayed from 1924 until now. But we still do not know when the clock was made, but the auction house estimated it to have been made around 1830. And that is the story of our traveling clock!

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H.B. Massey Building: An Historical Restoration



Henry A. Mann, Sr.



Matilda Mann, wife of Henry

By Sue Hansen

Sue Hansen is a Registered Dental Hygienist, founder of Interim Innovations, and history enthusiast.

In September of 2013, two years after purchasing Spa Dental, my husband, James, and I decided to renovate the second floor of 68 Milton Avenue Ballston Spa. I met with Paul and Diane Marotta of PDL Enterprises at the property to consider options.

Originally we contemplated creating two rental apartments due the generous size of the building. Ultimately, all agreed to preserve the natural beauty, albeit difficult to envision in this dilapidated state. Creating one home would involve removing walls that separated double windows, relocating bathrooms, and restoring every aspect of the apartment. It was obvious that the walls constructed for office space were added at some point. After locating a wainscoting board with a name and date of 1942, it was realized that the 1940's was perhaps the last update.

Over the winter months of 2013-2014, the progress was extremely slow. The two bathrooms present were in the kitchen and hall, both not ideal. The radiators did not operate properly and required fabrication of parts no longer available, the electric wiring was faulty as well. On New Year's Eve a member of the cleaning staff called at 3am when a pipe burst, pouring water through the floors to the dental office below. This deep, high, narrow building was history and beauty disguised as decay.

In February, Paul and Diane made an amazing discovery. While removing linoleum flooring in the kitchen, Paul found a faded bowling lane complete with pin setting hardware. This singular event sparked an interest in researching # 68 Milton Ave. and a renovation became a historic restoration.

Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian, toured the dusty, cobwebbed rooms commenting on the later addition of walls, the rounded brick work over the windows. Lauren and Lynn, researchers, explained that the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* would be a starting point for research. Upon carefully examining the Sanborn Maps, coupled with the deed history, we realized several things; the street numbers had changed and that the building was indeed a restaurant and bowling alley with a kitchen in the rear of the first floor and cement between floors. The 1911 map read "Restrt Sal. Bowling 2Fl Iron Ceilings." This confirmed the lane discovery in a historically tangible way. Returning to the Sanborn map from 1897

"Herbert Ho" was at the same location. At this time it was not realized that Herbert Ho indicated the Herbert House Hotel (opening in 1886). A few years later, in 1904, the Herbert House Hotel at #62 Milton Avenue and several other properties were missing from the Sanborn Maps. Lauren compared the date on the deed indicating the Ballston Spa National Bank acquired the property in 1901. After careful review, we surmised fire had destroyed the original three story building. According to the deed, Mary Massey, Herbert's wife, was the person to buy the burned out land from the Ballston Spa National Bank in 1902 at auction for \$1,500.00. It was unknown the reason that the bank held the property, however, speculated that no fire insurance was obtained for the property.

Using the website Fultonhistory.com, reading hundreds of newspapers, it was ascertained that the Herbert House Hotel was a three-story building, small but well-appointed with a billiards room and eight sleeping rooms. A kitchen was situated on the third floor to prevent odors from bothering guests, and a barn existed in back. The *Saratogian* Newspaper, used to research the building, offered clues to the people as well. The *Saratogian* frequently wrote about H.B. Massey, his building and the trouble he was involved in. Herbert was a prominent man who displayed great compassion when he adopted Mary's two young boys and offered employment with the restaurant to them years later. Herbert, however, was known to be very demanding, using his fists and his words to control others. Numerous articles depicted Massey as an aggressive person, a man not afraid to sue the local railroad or a land owner for a tree limb injury. Herbert was an owner of pool halls and a contemporary of Saratoga's most famous gambling establishment owner, Richard

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Materials being sorted in the great room of the H.B. Massey Building.

Restoration

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Canfield and troubled businessman, “Cale” Mitchell. Illegal gambling, illegal alcohol sales and violence were his way of life in the early 1900’s.

The hotel burned completely March 1, 1901. Stephen Williams, a *Schenectady Gazette* reporter, provided photos of the burned out lot during his research of the bowling alley for the article ultimately published in February 2014. After the 1901 fire, it would be nine years before the Massey Café & Bowling, “a social club for ladies and gentlemen” opened. During this time of rebuilding, Herbert purchased Pleasure Grove, a pool hall, and later the White House Pool Hall after the suicide of Caleb Mitchell provided an opportunity to lease the pool hall near the Saratoga Racetrack. The crack-down of gambling establishments, led in part by the Trask family (known for the Yaddo Gardens of Saratoga Springs) occurred in 1902, causing “Pool Hall Wars”. Much was

written about this in the local newspapers.

Upon removing the bathroom tub, sink and badly damaged tile floor, Paul discovered the second bowling lane. In an attempt to repair the subfloor Paul, waist deep in the floor, found the foot pedal mechanism for the bowling lane and a 1911 baseball card. The “cement” floor description on the Sanborn map was merely rocks and soil used as a buffer in 1910.

The baseball card found in the ruined floor depicted Edward Cicotte, “knuckleball” pitcher for the Red Sox. Eddie later played for the White Sox and was involved in the 1919 World Series scandal. It is speculated that Edward Cicotte was cheated out of a bonus causing animosity against his manager, and bitterness in general. The card was in very good condition and today is framed for viewing of both sides. Cards like these were common in cigarette packs at this time and used to promote the sale of tobacco.

The bowling lane that was removed returned in the form of two tables thanks to local artist, Gordon Haymon. The metal circles used to steady the pins, and the

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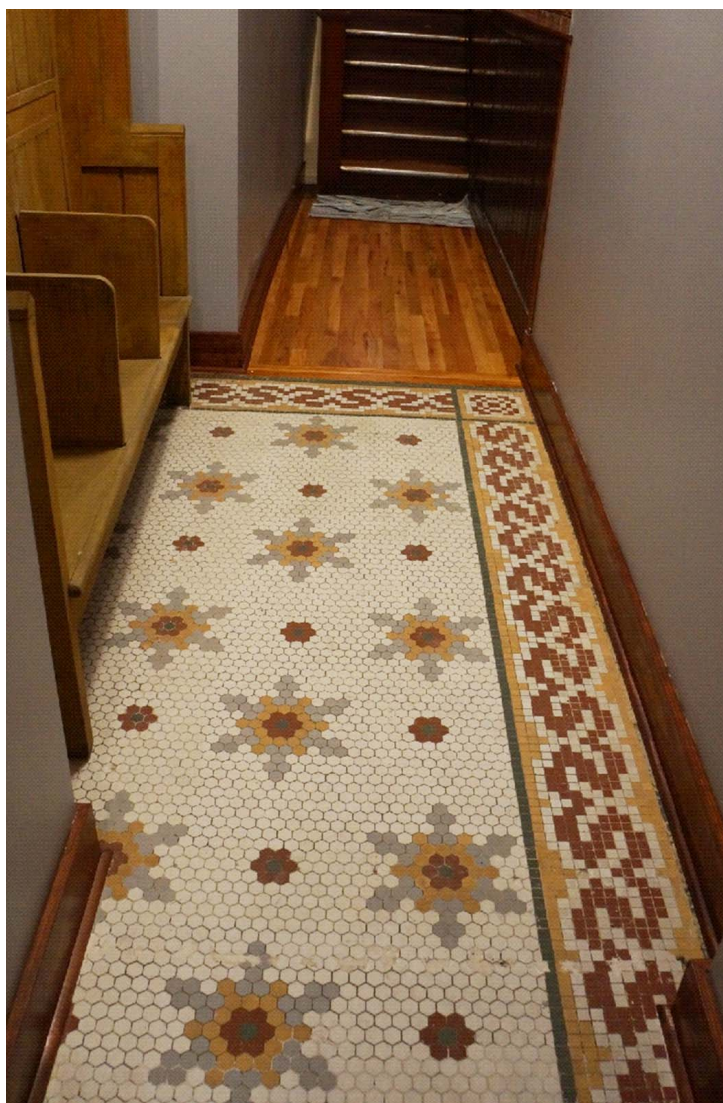
Restoration

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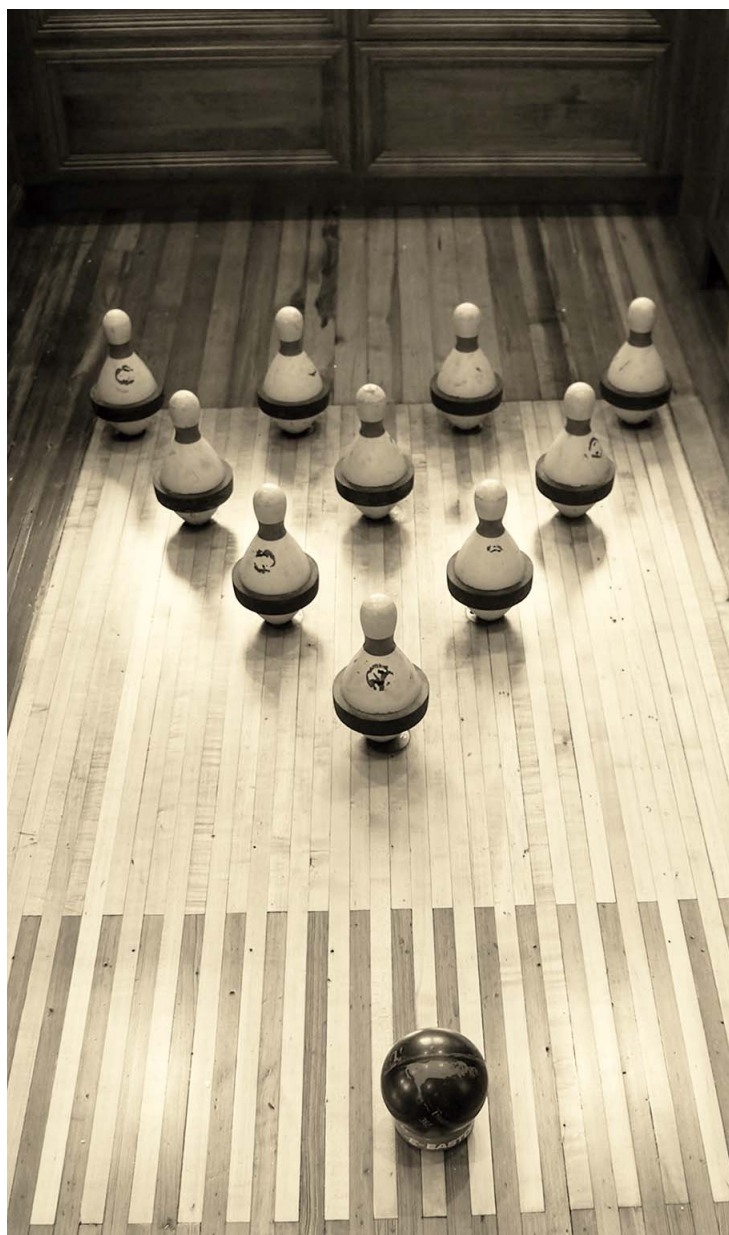
wood that held them, was constructed to both serve and be admired. The “Bowling Lane Tables” reside in the H.B. Massey Building apartment.

The original mosaic tile floor was a remarkable surprise under entryway hall carpeting. Unfortunately, the 1909 floor was covered in layer upon layer of glue and leveling compound. Over many months and thorough scraping with razor blades and strong products, the colorful flower and block design floor was restored to very good condition.

During the renovation every door was marked and removed. Each foot of iron primed and painted. Ceiling



The *Saratogian* reported this tile was laid by the same firm that placed J.S. Wooley's tile in two store entrances on Milton Avenue. The hall tile was renovated over several months using water, orange solvent, and razor blade to remove compounds and glue used to level the floor and adhere carpeting.



The intact pin-setting mechanism in one of the alleys.

pieces that were removed lay stacked in the great room; or sorting room. The two full bathrooms were created with new subway tile as was common in the 1900 era and stone countertops were installed. Surrounding the gas stove, a hearth was placed, made from reclaimed brick and laid to resemble the brick on the southern wall. The original 1910 building was brick and tin/iron on all surfaces (perhaps to reduce the risk of a future fire), by revealing the brick along the length of one wall, texture and color offered an interesting contrast to the bronze-colored ceilings.

The restoration of the bowling lanes/ floor was a several week process. Due to the sap in the fir flooring, the removal of glue, and over one hundred years of neglect, the flooring was particularly difficult to restore. More

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Restoration

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than once it was deemed impossible to remove the remnants of linoleum, however, persistence paid off and the beauty of the contrasting boards is truly amazing.

On November 6, 2014 an Open House celebrated the completion of the bowling alley apartment. Between February and November 2014 pipes, electrical wiring, radiators, walls, iron ceiling, doors, windows and floor boards had been lovingly restored or replaced. Additions such as period lighting, a beautiful chandelier, antique mirror and a claw foot tub were brought in from a mansion in Connecticut to complete the feel of the H.B. Massey Building. Approximately 25 guests came to see the bowling lanes, learn about Herbert Massey and experience the contributions of talented craftsmen and artists. Period bowling pins and a ball lent themselves to a bit of

old-fashioned fun for the partygoers who marveled at duckpin bowling in a kitchen.

John “Herbert” B. Massey was 51 years of age when the Massey Café & Bowling opened for business in 1910. Mr. Massey passed away April 23, 1917 and is buried in Ballston Spa. Shortly after Herbert’s death the business failed.

Paul and Diane Marotta of PDL Enterprises, numerous local companies and individuals have lovingly restored # 68 Milton Ave, known as the H.B. Massey Building. By listening to what this building whispered, the result was spectacular and one truly feels as though they experience the 1910 era upon entering.

**Sanborn Maps is an American publisher of historical and current maps of US cities and towns. The maps were initially created to estimate fire insurance risks. The company's maps are frequently used for historical research, and for preservation and restoration efforts.*

Sawmills in Saratoga County – Leading Industry in Early Years

The following article was printed in the Fall 1980 Gristmill. This summer the Saratoga County Historical Society at Brookside Museum will feature an exhibit called IndusTREE, the story of the lumber business in Saratoga County.

**By G. Terry Scharrer, Smithsonian Institute
Washington, D.C.**

The first sawmill in Saratoga County was erected at Halfmoon in 1762. Several others followed before the end of the eighteenth century. Northumberland (1777), Charlton (1783), Wilson (1784), Providence (1786), Greenfield (1789), and Hadley (1791). By 1860 there were twenty-two sawmills throughout the county, mostly making building materials for local use. Since flour milling was a seasonal business, and because millers constantly needed a supply of hardwood barrel stave, flour and saw mills were often built in tandem. Flour milling was the leading manufacturing industry in the county in 1860; saw milling was sixth.

As farmers cleared their land, they had the chance to earn money from the felled trees. They burned wood for charcoal and used the ashes to make soda and lye. With the opening of Blood’s edge tool factory in Ballston in 1838, and the later beginning of several agricultural implement manufactories, some farmers kept coppice stands to sell for the marking of handles. In 1870, the value of forest products sold from farms amounted to \$123, 017—roughly the same as orchard produce. Firewood sales, of course, always accounted for a portion of farmers’ income.

Manufacturing in virtually every village depended to some extent on the county’s woodlots. Wagon and sleigh

builders, coopers, cabinet and coffin makers, canal boats and bridge builders, and makers of pumps, washboards, doors and sashes, kitchen ware and clothespins demanded more and more wood, both for fabrication and fuel. The pulp and paper industry required the most.

Of the county’s several pulp/paper factories, perhaps the most important was at Corinth. Out of the Adirondacks, river drivers floated rafts of soft-wood timbers down the waterway to Corinth’s Hudson River Pulp and Paper Company, established in 1869. Stone grinders reduced the logs to pulp from which the company manufactured a variety of papers from newsprint to book stock. In 1898, the Corinth mill was one of twenty-one factories in New York, New England and Canada brought to form the International Paper Company. But already by 1880, paper making, at eighteen establishments, employed more people and produced a greater value of goods than (sic) any other kind of manufacturing in Saratoga County. The use of paper for collars and cuffs and bags, as well as for printing, added even more importance to this industry’s role in the county’s economy.

The decline of Saratoga’s forest concerns was part of America’s waning “wooden age” after World War I. Coal replaced wood for fuel. Metals and later plastics became more important in fabricating more things from kitchen ware to boat hulls and preservatives reduced the need for constantly replacing railroad ties and building materials. For paper making, southern, western and Canadian forests outstripped eastern software production. The mills moved to where the trees were, although some factories remained in New York, providing, as they had for decades, alternative employment for farmers leaving the land.