The Gristmill
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Preserving the History of Saratoga County
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The Great Bank Robbery – Part II

By Russ VanDervoort, Town of Waterford Historian

In our last issue, Waterford Historian, Russ VanDervoort told the story of the daring bank robbery that took place in Waterford on the night of October 1, 1872. In this issue, he continues the story with Part Two- The Punishment.

The Historical Marker, on what was the bank building, describes the robbery.

A break in the case finally materialized in New York City on December 18, 1872, two months after the robbery. William Brandon, the New York City fence, was arrested for selling some of the bonds that were stolen in the Waterford robbery. Dr. Chauncey Boughton of Waterford, a bank vice president, went to the City to take custody of Brandon and on the advice of New York City Justice Dowling, concealed him in a covered carriage to place him on the train back to Troy. Brandon spent the night in the Waterford Jail before a hearing the next day in Waterford Court and then he was transferred to Ballston Spa where he was released on bail. As we see later on, charges would be eventually dropped as part of a compromise plan worked out with the Bank.

On February 3, 1873, Peter Curley was taken into custody in New York City in a German bar owned by Max Schoenborn, and charged with the Waterford Bank Robbery. This time two Troy detectives, not a bank vice president, traveled to the city to effect Curley's return. They were hindered by members of the NYC Police Department who tried to help Curley escape and threatened by those in the gambling community of which Curley was a prominent figure in both NYC and Saratoga Springs. Curley confidently called off the forces trying to assist him and returned willingly with the detectives. He told the detectives he did them a favor out of friendship. He stated that if he had ordered it, the detectives would have been killed. Curley met the same fate as Brandon: Waterford Jail, court, and transfer to Ballston Spa. Curley, though, would stand trial. The trial became known as the Ballston Farce and according to the *Daily Saratogian*, the results of the trial would lower the standard of Saratoga County juries. Ultimately, three people were arrested for the Waterford Bank Robbery, Brandon, Curley, and Killoran. Killoran was arrested much later and would be the only one to actually serve time for his part in the robbery.

While awaiting trial, Peter Curley, who was confined to the Ballston Spa Jail, became the object of great interest and was covered extensively by the local papers, as evidenced by this article excerpted from *The Saratoga Gazette*.

"A peculiar feature of the case was the infatuation for the prisoner which possessed several young ladies from the village, who daily carried flowers to the jail while Curley was confined there, but which the jailer persistently refused to deliver to the prisoner."

And, the following from the May 7, 1873 *Saratoga Sentinel*:

"There is a natural love for good looking scoundrels which can never be wholly driven from the female

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breast. Certain Ballston Spa girls, making claims to respectability and standing, we learn, are actively engaged in flirting with Peter Curley the Waterford Bank Robber through the gates of his cell. Curley is a good looking, gentlemanly appearing man, and the deviltry and mystery surrounding him, make him in the eyes of these silly damsels; a very Claude Duval. And Claude, as everyone knows, was the most delightful sinner that ever lived."

A successful tactic of the bank robbing syndicate that was utilized often was the offer in compromise. They were always cautious not to harm anyone. They tried to steal from wealthy investors who could afford to, and be more willing to, compromise to get their bonds back and cut their losses. These traits lent themselves to offers in compromise being a way out for the banks that were the victims. Perhaps an early version of today's ransomware.

The terms proposed by the gang were that the bank and bondholders would pay $35,000 to the bank robbers. The bank would recover the bonds, jewelry, and silver and no further action would be taken against any of the Waterford Nine. The Bank refused and the case went to trial.

When the final day of the trial came to its completion it was 9:08 pm and the jury went into deliberation. By 10pm, they announced that they had reached a verdict. Not guilty. At 11pm Curley, his team of lawyers, and the entire jury were seated at an elegant table in the Sans Souci Hotel in Ballston Spa for a banquet and wine in celebration of the acquittal. The bill was paid by Curley.

Soon after the trial was over, the original offer in compromise was accepted by the bank. The robbers received $35,000, all charges dismissed and the bank received most of their bonds. The Saratoga County Bank at Waterford never fully recovered from the effects of the robbery. On December 1, 1884, it was declared a financial wreck, liquidated its holdings, paid depositors, and ceased operations.

The gang who robbed the bank continued until about the turn of the century. Their biggest haul ever was the Manhattan Bank Robbery of 1878. Jimmy Hope was the lead in this one with several of the same characters from the 1873 Waterford robbery. The take for the Manhattan Robbery was $2,757,700. Several from this job wisely retired but two were subsequently murdered. Most of the gang died penniless in old age. Peter Curley continued robbing banks throughout his life. He also dabbled in arson for hire. He once set fire to his St. James Hotel and was suspected of several others. His final job was in 1906 and was reported in the September 19, 1906 *Troy Times:*

"Peter Curley of this city, a noted gambler, bank robber and all around crook, died in the homeopathic hospital, Albany, as a result of being burned in a saloon fire last night. Having gone into the place for the purpose of setting it afire, according to police, he was caught in his own fire trap, the fuse that he used being so short that an explosion occurred before he could make his escape from the place."

"Curley was 67 years old and came into prominence with his participation in the 1873 Waterford Bank robbery. He and his accomplices secured $200,000 in the haul. Several times he has been accused of being a professional fire bug, but his accusers were never able to prove the charge. Curley was known throughout the state in sporting circles, and despite his criminal tendency, his gentlemanly manner and true sportsmanlike conduct in games of chance gained him many friends."

Story Sources

The *Albany Evening Daily Times* October 14, 1872
Brooklyn Daily Eagle October 15, 1872
The T*roy Weekly Times*., June 07, 1873
The *Daily Saratogian* May 27, 1873 and November 23, 1873
The *New York Times* June 5, 1878
The *Glens Falls Morning Star* December 2, 1884
Troy Times September 19, 1906
The *Bench and Bar of Saratoga County* Enos R Mann
The *Daily Saratogian* carried detailed news of the trial each day.

Factoid:

In 1897 over 100,0000 men rushed to the Klondike in search of gold but some men decided it would be easier to find it in Saratoga County. A group of Saratoga Springs men formed a syndicate and leased land in Greenfield and began to dig. The headline in the October 18, 1897 "*Saratoga Eagle*" read: "Everyone Gone Gold Crazy" and sure enough, they found gold but it was only worth $26.87 per ton.

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100,000 Fancy Fans: the Rise and Fall of the Splinterville Fan Factory

By Dave Waite

Driving north out of Saratoga Springs on Church Street it is easy to miss the small turnoff called Old State Road that loops off to the left, crossing little Bell Brook and quickly reentering the highway. Near this creek crossing was once the location of an industry that during its short lifespan, provided jobs to residents of Greenfield and fashionable hand fans much sought-after by ladies in Saratoga Springs and beyond.

Hand fans were an important fashion accessory for women in American society, where they were used for their practical purpose to assist in staying cool, as well as an important accessory in social circles. Where people gathered at important society places like Saratoga Springs, they were also used as a way for women to silently communicate to others. The fans produced at Splinterville became a very popular item of the summer crowd in Saratoga Springs, and soon were being sold at Lord and Taylor's in New York City and other large stores throughout the Northeast.

Judson D. Root was the first man to manufacture fans in Greenfield. He had come to Greenfield from Otsego County, New York in January of 1855 with his 25-year-old wife Sabra, her four-year-old son Ansel, and his wife's brother, 19-year-old Joel Tuller. The 32-year-old Root was reported in the Greenfield census for that year as being a basket maker. It is possible that he learned the trade from 65-year-old Greenfield resident and neighbor Hiram Hill, who was also listed with that occupation in 1855.

In some reports concerning Root's factory, Saratoga Springs businessman Seymour Ainsworth is said to have financed or even owned the business. While these references to Ainsworth are all in newspaper articles written eighty years or more after the splint fan era passed, the only clear connection with Splinterville was his selling the fans and other products of the factory at his store in downtown Saratoga Springs. In 1865, Ainsworth did apply for a patent for feather fans, though there is no indication that feathers were used for any fans made in Splinterville.

By 1860 Judson Root was making fancy splint fans using white ash splints in his water-powered factory that sat along Bell Brook. The factory employed 12 men, who were paid $15 a month, and 25 women, who received $5.60. The production that year was an astounding 8,750 dozen, equaling 105,000 fans, with a value of $55,000. The factory employed numerous family members and neighbors, with 16 of these women listing "fan worker" as their occupation in the 1860 Census. The average age of these women was 22, the oldest being 60-year-old Sally Seymour, and the youngest fourteen-year-old Frances E. Sherman.

Though not listed in the 1860 Industry census, 58-year-old Greenfield resident Edward Russell also gave Manufacturer of Fans as his occupation. His 26-year-old son, Jarvis Russell, was working for his father in fan production as well, and a few years later would be running his own fan factory.

In September of 1860, the Saratoga County Agricultural Society annual fair was held in Saratoga Springs. When the judges were passing out prizes, one of the winners was a variety of fans and fancy baskets made at Judson Root's factory, the baskets being awarded a $1 prize. Only a few weeks later, Judson and his wife were involved in a serious accident that would begin a time of changes in their lives.

At the end of October, Mr. & Mrs. Root took a group of young ladies, possibly the same women who worked in their fan factory, for a wagon ride through the town of Milton. While crossing a bridge, one of the wagon wheels went off the road, frightening the horses. Everyone was thrown from the wagon, with Judson being dragged underneath when he held onto the reins. His injuries were severe enough that there was fear at first that he would lose his sight.

While there were no further reports of his injuries or details of his recovery after the accident Judson Root was never again noted as a business owner in Greenfield. He did however continue to work as a fancy splint worker until late in the 1870s when he returned to his earliest career in Greenfield as a basket maker. Judson D. Root passed away in 1890 in Greenfield. Several years after his death, a Splinterville resident reminisced about Root and his factory in a letter to the October 23, 1902, *Daily Saratogian*: 'the Yankee genius of Judson Root made things hum, 'way back in '50. It was thar he invented an' set to work machinery for poundin' splints from black ash logs, an' shavin' 'um in shape tew be cut by his ingenious contrivances into material for makin' of splint fans and baskets for the southern trade.'

When in the Spring of 1861, Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor it was a turning point in American history, as well as a drying up of the market for fancy splint fans made in Greenfield. This was due to both changes in fashion and the lack of southern tourists into Saratoga during the war. By 1865 the factories in Splinterville switched much of their production to fancy baskets, though with a greatly diminished output.

The 1865, New York census for Greenfield lists George O. Chamberlin as the owner of the fancy splint work fac-

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tory. George Olcott Chamberlin was born in New Hampshire in 1803, and by 1836 he and his wife were living in Saratoga County where their son, John Clark Chamberlin was born. By 1860, they had settled in Greenfield and five years later he had taken over the fancy splint work business that Judson Root had started. The Chamberlin family lived next door to the Roots, and, likely, Judson Root was still very involved in the day-to-day operation of the factory. Another neighbor, Willard Richardson, also gave his occupation as Fancy Splint Manufacturer in 1865, though it is the only year that he is shown as being associated with the factory.

Using water to power their machinery, Chamberlin employed three men and thirty women. While the monthly salary for men had stayed the same since the 1860 census, the pay for the women had dropped to $5 per month. The estimated output that was reported was only a fraction of what was produced five years earlier, being only 2000 bark baskets.

Another man who was sometimes mentioned as a splint fan manufacturer was Augustus Hard Dunham. Born in Greenfield in 1828, Augustus, a neighbor of Judson Root in Splinterville, worked as a fan maker until enlisting for service in the Civil War. He entered the service as a private Company H, of the 77th New York Infantry, on October 17, 1861, and was discharged at Annapolis, Maryland due to disability on July 8, 1862. The 77th Infantry fought in the Siege of Yorktown in April of 1862 and as well as several minor skirmishes during the time that Augustus Dunham served.

Elisa Hiller, one of the children of Augustus Dunham and his wife Henrietta, told the story of her father's return home from the war. One morning while the family was hard at work at their daily chores, a carriage pulled up to the front of their home. From it soon emerged a frail-looking, white-faced man who the family hardly recognized as their husband and father. Having a heart problem due to the strain of marches and battle, he had been honorably discharged due to his physical disability.

Augustus Dunham recovered sufficiently so that by 1865 he was again doing the fancy splint work, even listing himself as a manufacturer in the census of that year. His daughter Ella recalled that as a child she would go into the factory to work with her sister Annie when extra help was needed. For their efforts, she remembers being paid one dollar a day. By 1870, Dunham had left splint work and devoted his time to the family farm, work he would continue to pursue until his death at age 59 in 1887. Augustus Hard Dunham is buried in the North Milton Cemetery beside his wife Henrietta, who passed away in 1909, and two of his children.

Another local man Edward D. Russell, who had worked over the years in fancy splint work at Splinterville, had returned to farming in 1865. However, other members of his family continued in splint work. In 1870 both his son Jarvis, and wife Rachel were listed as operating fancy splint work factories in Splinterville. While both were year-round operations, the factory run by Jarvis was the only one utilizing water-powered machinery. His shop used ash timber, silk, and merino wool for materials and produced over 2,000 fancy baskets each year. The total salary for the one man and five women who worked for him was $300 for 1870.

Jarvis Russell was also a Civil War veteran, having enlisted in Company D, 77th Infantry as a private on November 11, 1861. The 77th Infantry fought at Antietam in September of 1862. He was mustered out and returned to Greenfield in November of 1863.

At the factory listed in his mother's name in the 1870 census, all the work was done with manual labor. Mrs. Russell had one man in her employment, as well as ten women and one child under 15. While her yearly cost for salaries was higher than her sons at $700, she had five more employees and produced a wider assortment of products, including 200 dozen work baskets, 10 dozen fans, 50 dozen toy baskets, and 25 dozen toys with a total value of $1,600.

The Russell family continued with splint work through 1875, though the product by then consisted only of baskets. No longer using waterpower, all the work making baskets was now done by hand. Jarvis employed 10 women and five girls at four dollars a month, producing 3000 baskets worth $1,600 annually. His younger brother, 21-year-old George E. Russell, was also running a fancy basket operation that year. His factory, also using only manual labor, employed 13 women, one boy, and six girls all earning $7 a month. Their production that year was 7000 baskets valued at $3,500. One notable employee was 74-year-old Sally Seymour, who had been working at the production of fancy splint fans and baskets since the first factory opened almost 20 years earlier.

Judson Root's brother-in-Law, Joel D. Tuller, who had come to Greenfield from Otsego County was not reported as having been employed in the splint works factory until 1870. In 1875, his occupation in the Greenfield census was listed as a manufacturer of splint baskets. The business of making products from ash splints was at an end by 1870 with that year only Judson Root, 58, and Cephas Rose, age 63, were listed as being basket makers in the town.

Not long after the demise of the splint work factories, members of the community voted to change the name of the hamlet to Cascades, a name that acknowledged the rapids on tiny Bell Brook that had once provided waterpower to the factories that sat on its edge. Years after, still lamenting this change, Cascades resident Lewis W. Cookingham wrote this poem titled "To Splinterville,"

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To Splinterville

The pleasant little hamlet
That was known as Splinterville
Named after its good industry
Is no longer called a ville.
And at a special meeting
The old name was voted down
By a majority of the residents
For a name with a better sound
Cascades was the name selected
For this hamlet on the hill
Which sounds so much better
Than the old name, Splinterville
Way back in the fifties
It was a busy place for men
Wove fancy fans and baskets,
Splinterville was all right then.
Then lots of men and women
Were earning their daily bread
Working late and early
On those splints as fine as thread.
But after the war was over,
The Southern trade was gone,
Then the racket at the factory
Did not last so very long
The one-time great industry
Which employed so many hands,
In now gone but not forgotten,
In memory it still stands.
The rushing brook of water
Goes unmolested down the hill,
With no waterwheel to paddle
As it did in Splinterville.
The old water wheel has rotted
And no more we hear its sounds,
For the last and only landmark,
The old factory is torn down.
Things have changed about the place
As the years have passed away,
So, good-by to old Splinterville
Cascades, it's called today.

I want to thank Greenfield Historian Ron Feulner for his assistance in researching this article and also John Greenwood for taking me on a tour of Splinterville and sharing some of his vast knowledge of Greenfield history.

The turning point for Ballston Spa came in 1986

This article was written during the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the incorporation of the Village of Ballston Spa in 2007. The author was the editor of the Ballston Journal for 28 years and in that capacity, witnessed the events described. He was also the owner of Ballston Printing Company, a commercial printer of newspapers and advertising flyers that was one of the last remaining mauufacturing companies operating in the Village.

By Charles Hogan, PhD

Charles Andrews Editor of the *Ballston Journal*, wrote in his history piece for the Sesquicentennial celebration that the Village was less busy than it used to be. Little did he realize that the Village was just about to become even less busy.

For the next twenty years, the decline in economic activity, already apparent to Andrews in 1957, would accelerate. By the end of the twentieth century, the last of the mills had closed and Ballston Spa was neither a tourist town or a mill town.

Ballston Spa became a compactly-built older community, with residents who mostly worked outside the Village, and with a retail shopping district that was contracting. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, it looked likely that the Village would lose the remaining part of it's retail district.

In the third quarter of the twentieth century, residents and Village leaders did not consider the buildings they inherited from the ninteenth century to be an asset.

The Village adopted a zoning code based on that of suburban towns. It limited the lot coverage of new construction and the Village Planning Board was vey concerned that any new retail construction, such as the shopping plaza on Doubleday Ave., contain adequate parking in front of the stores. Empty lots, such as the one near the Gordon Creek on Milton Ave., were turned into parking lots.

To the extent that there was new construction, and there was not much new construction during the 1960's and 1970's, it was designed to look "modern." Saratoga County demolished the old County Court house complex on West High St. to make way for a building that took advantage of Carter administration grants for solar energy use. The grants actually cost the County more money than it would have taken to re-model the old buildings or

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build a conventional new building. The solar system proved unworkable.

This attitude began to turn around in the mid '70's. At the national level, old houses, especially old Victorian houses, began to come back into style. A few early adapters in Ballston Spa, caught the trend.

Local attorney Robert Trieble, owned a large Victorian-era home on East High St. He first remodeled it, in mid-twentieth century style, by trying to make it modern. An architect designed a Southwest-modern kitchen addition. Then, Trieble came around to appreciating Victorian architecture. He subscribed to *Old House Journal*, and bought a Victorian-era room set wallpaper for the living room.

Local contractor Kirk Westbrook, established a company called Brookside Restorations, and began applying traditional building techniques to historical restorations. Local attorney John Cromie restored a Victorian home on the corner of Bath St. and Van Buren St., later buying and resoring the Doubleday House.

Brookside Museum was founded, with a disproportionate amount of help by Ballston Spa residents during the period of history enthusiasm surrounding the nation's bicentennial celebration in 1976. Another museum, the National Bottle Museum, grew out of a local club of bottle collectors.

The tilting point came in 1986. New York State remodeled NY State Rt. 50, which gave Village leaders, under the guidance of Mayor Bert Grandin, a chance to define the style that would be appropriate for the Village. In collaboration with the newly formed Ballston Business and Professional Association, the Village decided to go with a Victorian theme. Under the leadership of Bill Bennison, the BPBA hired architects who lead public seminars advocating a traditional look for downtown.

Other parts of civic life also began to turn around.

Like many communities, the quality of life in downtown Ballston Spa was degraded by the crime epidemic that started in the late 1960's. Ballston Spa was never a dangerous place, but living downtown could be unpleasant. The old police structure of Ballston Spa, a full-time chief and a full-time sergeant, plus part-timers, was not able to cope well with this change. During the administration of James Capasso, Jr., the Village moved towards a more full-time police, which improved police protection.

The problem of loitering teenagers was much improved by the founding of the Ballston Area Center for Teens. Originally located in a building to the rear of St. Mary's Church, the organization built a new center on an unused piece of property in the center of the Village and changed it's name to the Ballston Area Community Center.

The school system also went into a funk, starting in the late '60's. A particularly bitter unionization drive, resulting in a teacher strike, started an era of bad feelings. The late adoption of zoning in the Town of Milton (1968), allowed a rapid influx of mobile home courts, which also put stress on the school system. A new Middle School, with an experimental open design, added to the confusion.

A dramatic improvement in Village parks was done, mainly, on the iniative, and by the efforts, of individual residents. The Old Iron Spring, the very symbol of the Village, was restored by a group of volunteers, under the leadership of Steven Esposito.

In the early 1990's, with Roger Gorham as Superintendent of Schools and John Duffy as Business Manager, along with School Board members such as Doug Young, Paul DeCotis, and Larry Woolbright, the school District put it's house in order.

The administrations of the two Capasso's - James Capasso, Sr. and James Capasso, Jr., saw a much-needed investment in the Village water system. The Village built a water tower, moved to using wells as a water source, and invested in new water lines.

Two new employers, Angelica Industrial Laundries and Reserve America, offered jobs for entry-level workers. A new warehouse district was formed near the old knitting mill. The Pressroom, a printing company, retained an element of manufacturing in the Village.

The BSBPA took on the task of improving the look of the Village. Starting in the late '80's, the Village began to sprout flowers, especially in the much-improved Wiswall and Old Iron Spring parks.

During the early '80's, the Ballston Spa National Bank returned to funding local business ventures with commercial loans, a business line that the bank had largely abandoned since the Depression.

Local businessman, John Stanislowski, started an annual Village-wide Garage Sale, which attracted thousands of visitors to the Village. Other festivals soon followed.

John Romano, first as Village Trustee and later as Mayor, co-operated wholeheartedly with the effort to create community spirit through special events. He tirelessly plugged the theme of Village renewal. Romano made a fitting Master of Ceremonies for the Bicentennial celebrations.