

# Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

GC News  
June 9, 1974

The amount of small-scale manufacturing in Greene County prior to the Civil War has yet to be explored in depth. Many of these firms opened and closed within relatively short periods of time and left few records for today's historians to examine. Fortunately most of them believed in advertising such as the Cornwall Hat Manufactory of Cairo and cabinetmaker Humphrey R. Potter of Windham.

In the township of Cairo, "opposite the south stone bridge," in December of the year 1831 four Cornwalls, namely Thomas, George, Solomon and John C. were busy setting up their factory for the production of hats, utilizing the structure heretofore occupied by A. & T. Cornwall. All four partners were experienced, practical hatters and were prepared to manufacture in quantity both finished and unfinished head gear, primarily for the New York and the Albany markets. They were prepared, however, to sell retail to local customers. The Cornwalls, in their advertisements, stressed that their products were

made of the best, durable materials.

Within two years, the partnership had collapsed for reasons unknown. In December, 1833, we find Thomas Cornwall advertising as the sole proprietor, utilizing the services of competent journeymen. As a sideline he was also carrying a line of cloth caps.

Farther west, up on the Mountain Top at Osborneville (Windham) cabinetmaker Humphrey R. Potter was developing a sizeable trade. Furniture, in general, was expensive to ship distances, hence the local market for this craftsman. By May of 1833 he was prepared to supply furniture of cherry, pine, curled maple or the more exotic mahogany. From his shop came bureaus, sideboards, secretaries, settees, chests and chests of drawers; cherry tables and stands; bed of various styles including high post, field, French or common. Depending upon the housewife's taste, he could also supply "fancy chairs" with either cane or flag (rush) seats, Windsors, as well as a variety of "common chairs," all in the best

styles and workmanship.

As a sideline Potter has on hand an assortment of treenware: measures, dippers, ladles, sieves, facets, butter bowls, soap dishes, tubs, pails, churns and cheese hoops. Those seeking a special gift could select from his assortment of "fancy work boxes." This Windham shop was also the headquarters for window glass of all sizes, lamp oil for summer and winter, paints and brushes, Humphrey being prepared to mix paint colors upon demand at short notice, plus supplying directions for their use.

Like most shopkeepers, Humphrey preferred cash but indicated a willingness to barter for lumber and country produce, giving fair market value. Approved credit was also a possibility.

There is no indication cabinetmaker Potter even marked his furniture for identification, either by printed label or by branding. Therefore we will never know what, if any, furniture has survived in Windham or nearby communities.

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Published semi-monthly, *The Magnolia*, or *Literary Tablet*, by P. Dean Carrique of the *Hudson Gazette*, reached its reading public between the dates of Oct. 5, 1833 and Sept. 20, 1834. Distribution in New York reached as far west as Syracuse, and easterly into Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and Rhode Island. In Greene County, two persons acted as agents for the magazine (Charles S. Willard of Catskill and Thomas Netterville of Athens).

"Devoted to literature, moral and sentimental tales, poetry, etc." Carrique planned one issue every other Saturday, in super royal octave form of 16 pages each. The price, payable in advance, was one dollar the year. Persons acting as agents and obtaining at least five subscribers, were entitled to one free

copy, more if additional readers were lined up. The agent was responsible for collections. Postage was one cent for mailings under 100 miles; over that and also out-of-state, it rose to one and one-half cents.

Publisher Carrique admitted he was facing heavy competition from similar literary publications already on the market, some with national prestige. However, he felt an enlightened public would read "literary material calculated to cherish the principles of moral virtue, and shew forth the deformity of vice." It should also "produce and encourage a taste for the fine arts."

Scattered throughout the issues were notices of marriages and deaths, mostly in Columbia and Greene counties, such as the death of Captain John T. Haviland of

Athens, in his 44th year. The Hudson Forum, an educational group interested in timely national topics, was chaired by Ambrose L. Jordan; it merited columnar space. The death of Lafayette, a Frenchman by birth but American by adoption, called for literary coverage in prose and poetry. Such poetical musings as "Evening on the Hudson" attracted the reader's interest, they being local in content.

In its final issue of Sept. 20, 1834, the publisher was forced to admit defeat, making a plea for overdue subscription money. Now more than a century later, a bound Volume One copy of *The Magnolia* had been added to the imprint collection of the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Research Library. It is the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Clark of Athens.

GC News 6/23/1993