

This Week in Saratoga County History

The Hop City Road Curtiss Farm

Submitted by William C. Curtiss, October 8, 2025



Anson Curtiss (1849-1932), grandchildren Willam S, Jane and Charlotte

Bill Curtiss was born in 1952 at the Benedict Memorial Hospital, the second child of Wm S. Curtiss Jr and Beverly Lane. In 1973 Bill married his high school sweetheart, Carol Wilson in 1973. Together they raised their daughter Christel and now have three grandchildren. Bill is the President of the Ballston Spa Village Cemetery and continues to research his family history.

On Hop City Road in the Town of Ballston sits the Willow Marsh Farm, the farm on which my dad, William Schuyler Curtiss Jr. was born and raised. For five generations, the farm has been owned by successive Curtiss families, currently by my cousin Chuck Curtiss.

The Curtiss family in America goes back almost 400 years. In 1637 my ninth great-grandparents John (1577-1639) and Elizabeth *Hutchins*, migrated from England to Roxbury MA. By 1639, they and their three sons had moved on to Stratford, Connecticut, becoming some of the founding settlers of that village.

The line continues with William, followed by three Jonathans, then on to my fourth great-grandfather, Andrew. Andrew Curtiss, and his wife Patience Nichols and family moved from Huntington, Connecticut to the Town of Charlton, NY around 1796. The family quickly became members of the Ballston Center Presbyterian Church, founded by the Reverend Eliphalet Ball. Andrew's brother, Jonathan is the ancestral line of the Curtis Lumber family. Andrew was a farmer who earlier had taken up arms in the Revolutionary War

Andrew and Patience's son, Abijah, my third great-grandfather, was born in 1791 in Huntington, Connecticut. He married Naomi Smith, originally from Bridgeport, Connecticut. Abijah was instrumental in securing the purchase of the current Hop City farm for his son, my second great-grandfather, William Smith Curtiss. Abijah's home was located on Middleline Road, where he also operated a gristmill and farm.

William Smith Curtiss, was born December 29, 1814 in the Town of Ballston. He married Martha VanOstrand in 1840, and they were parents to five children. In 1846, William purchased the subject 140-acre farm from the estate of William DeForest who had died two years earlier. The sale of the farm was for the benefit of the orphaned young DeForest children.

From what I remember listening to family stories, William S. Curtiss was not a hands-on farmer. He fell into the category of 'Gentleman Farmer', more of a supervisor. He and his successors are credited with continuing improvements to the farm's facilities and its dairy herd. William served as town Justice and assessor. In his later years, William spent his winters in the village. Newspaper articles show various addresses, including West High Street and Ballston Avenue. The New York census of 1892 lists William and daughter Anna as living near Becky Jones, the infamous 'Obstinate Becky'. Becky's house still stands on West High Street adjacent to where the Gordon Creek tributary flows under the road. Incidentally, on the 1880 US census, my wife Carol's second great-grandparents are listed on the same West High Street page, so they were apparently neighbors, small world!

William's son Anson (my great-grandfather), was born in 1849 and inherited the farm in 1892. Unlike his father, Anson was a very hands-on farmer up until his retirement. Following in his father's footsteps, he was very involved in town affairs, also serving as Justice of the Peace and town assessor. Anson's wife Esther and her sisters are credited with establishing a Sunday School called the Hop City Sabath School in the mid 1880's. In the early 1900's, Anson and wife Esther spent the winter months in the Village. Many society columns indicate they resided on Church Avenue, Ballston Avenue, renting the furnished summer home of prominent New York City attorney John P Brown on McMaster Street. Eventually the couple purchased a very small house on Ballston Avenue.

Upon Anson's retirement, my grandfather, William Schuyler Curtiss Sr. continued to operate the farm. Grandpa was always referred to as 'Schuyler', so as not to be confused with his grandfather and later my dad. Schuyler was born on the farm in 1885. He married Winnie Boyd from West Oneonta in 1922. Schuyler and Winnie raised nine children; my dad was the oldest son. Schuyler utilized all available resources for improvements in breeding, sanitation and feeding for the dependable quality of the generated milk. Many prize-winning cows were among the farm's herd over the years. Grandma operated a convalescent nursing home that was attached to the farmhouse for several years.

Gathering your family's story requires research but also preserving memories. I remember my dad telling me that for several summers, he and Grandma would load up a horse and wagon with cooked chicken and baked goods to sell around Saratoga Lake during the summer track season. During some lean economic times, she sold her baked goods from a store front near the Hayner House on Bath Street. A couple of my uncles told me that there was a hired hand on the farm named 'Shorty'. He taught them how swear, smoke and spit. Grandma would be very upset when they had tobacco stains on their shoes.

I remember staying at the farm for a couple of weeks a few summers, riding on the tractor and hay wagon with Grandpa. A few mornings, Grandma would hand me a glass of water and send me upstairs to throw it on one of my younger uncles. I would hand him the glass and tell him to drink up.

Schuyler remained active, working a couple hours a day throughout his eighties. He was sixty-seven years old when I was born, so I always remember him as a gray-haired older man. He passed away in 1986, just two months short of his 101st birthday.

Schuyler's second oldest son, my uncle, Chuck Curtiss took over farming operations in the late 1950's or early 60's and continued the best practices for milk production. At some point, during his ownership, the farm was named Willow Marsh.

In 1983, an article written by Schuyler's sister, Marjorie for "The Gristmill", Saratoga County History Museum's quarterly newsletter, tells of a 'Pack Peddler' who visited the farm in the 1880's. One cold winter the peddler came to the farmhouse door trying to sell his wares. When Esther noticed that he was without a winter coat and that he was sick, she had him come in and sit by the stove and gave him supper and a cot to sleep on that night. In the morning, he was given breakfast and a warm coat and gloves. He tried to give the family the contents of his pack, but Anson would have none of that. He did leave some pencils for the children and a pillow cover for Esther, before heading down the road.

An article in the September 24, 1929, edition of the Ballston Daily Journal celebrating the fiftieth wedding anniversary of Esther and Anson, reveals how Hop City received its moniker. Anson recalls that at some point in the 1800's, there were five farms engaged in the growing of hops along the road. A little research shows that by the 1830's, Albany had a handful of breweries and was the largest hub for beer distribution in the U.S. This can probably be attributed to Albany's proximity to the recently completed Erie Canal. Brewers from the mid-west could now extend their sales further east.

The story of the Curtiss family in America now spans fourteen generations since the arrival of John and Elizabeth. Others local families may have their own stories to tell and preserve for future generations.