

THE
CENTENNIAL HISTORY

OF THE

TOWN OF DRYDEN, New York

1797--1897.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

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WITH THE AID OF THE CENTENNIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AND MANY OTHERS.

J. GILES FORD, PRINTER:
THE DRYDEN HERALD STEAM PRINTING HOUSE,
DRYDEN, NEW YORK.
1898.



Andrew Albright,

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ANDREW ALBRIGHT.

The biography of the subject of this chapter affords a typical instance of the young man, born and reared in the country, who is destined, in the eternal fitness of things, to become a prominent factor in the business life and interests of the great cities of our country. As in all ages the masses of people, congregated together to form the great centers of commerce and manufacture, draw their sustenance from the sparsely settled rural districts, so the great aggregations of people which form our metropolitan cities are continually drawing their most enterprising leaders in commerce, manufacture, and government, from the sons of the humble but industrious farmers of the country towns.

The parents of Andrew, Elisha and Elizabeth B. (Smith) Albright, were natives of New Jersey, and were married there about the year 1818. Elisha had, a year or two before, been to Dryden, where he worked as a lad for his older brother-in-law, John Hiles, in the saw-mill which the latter then operated at the foot of Dryden Lake. Their oldest son, Jacob, was born at Belvidere, N. J., September 4, 1819, and, when he was four months old, they came to seek their fortunes in the new country of Western New York. They brought themselves and all their possessions—which then consisted of a few house-keeping articles and sixty dollars in specie—not upon the traditional ox-sled of other pioneers, but in a one-horse wagon, in which they drove all the way from Belvidere to Dryden. They first took up their abode in a log house then located upon the now vacant knoll nearly opposite the Dryden Woolen Mill, on Main street in Dryden village, and afterwards lived in a plank house which Elisha built on a farm now owned by S. C. Fulkerson, in the north part of the town, where Aaron was born January 7, 1823. Again moving, they settled at one time on Fall

Creek near the Oliver Cady farm, and at another, near the residence of Elliott E. Fortner, where Andrew was born, June 23, 1831; until finally in 1832, having accumulated some property in spite of his frequent changes of location, he purchased of Selden Marvin his homestead farm three fourths of a mile north from "Dryden Four Corners." Here he reared his family of eleven children and developed from what was almost a wilderness one of the best farms in Tompkins county. The writer recalls the fact of seeing, in his childhood, about the year 1850, Elisha, then a tall, muscular man, surrounded by his sturdy sons, going out to the fields like a small army of giants to do the haying with scythes and hand rakes in the old-fashioned way. The time of his prosperity had then come and his productions were not confined to the bare necessities of life. His farm was noted for the fruit as well as the grain and butter which it produced. A strain of the Winter Steele apple grown to perfection in his orchards in great abundance had a local reputation. Although "stronghanded," in his latter years by the aid of his sons, labor saving devices were not disregarded and a home-developed water power was ingeniously made use of on the farm to do the threshing.

Being among the younger children, Andrew had the advantage of a fair common school education and remained upon the farm until he was of age. He then began to develop tendencies looking beyond the drudgery of a farmer's life. His inventive turn of mind was first directed to a patent wagon brake, which came to naught. One day, while driving, the thought of the use of hard rubber for harness trimmings, for which only leather had been used up to that time, occurred to him and he resolved to apply himself to the development of that subject. He was told by experts in the use of rubber that his idea was impracticable and that it was impossible to make use of rubber in that way, but, like all true inventors, he was not to be easily discouraged, and, concentrating all the energies of his resolute nature upon that subject, he finally demonstrated his success in achieving the desired result.

It is a well known fact that most true inventors lack the ability to reap the rewards of their own inventions, but here is where Albright differed from the generality of his class. As soon as his invention was made known, such experts as had ridiculed his designs as visionary were now ready to contest his title to the discovery. Suits had to be commenced and maintained in the U. S. courts, to sustain and protect his patent, or it would have availed him nothing. Mr. Albright was without pecuniary means at his disposal, while his rivals were con-

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nected with wealthy corporations. But here was the opportunity of his life. As Shakespeare puts it,—

“There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.”

In this emergency Mr. Albright called upon his father for help to sustain him. The old gentleman, who had acquired what little he possessed in the most laborious manner, and who had some doubt as to the final success of his son's enterprise, at first hesitated, but the necessity of this aid was so imperatively presented by the son, whose whole future depended upon it, that the father and older brothers at length lent their aid. The suits were decided in Albright's favor and the crisis of his life was successfully passed. Let not visionary young men be encouraged by this to embark their means in hazardous adventures. As the result has proved, Mr. Albright, when he applied for the aid of his family, was not about to try an experiment, but he was demonstrating a practical certainty. His success, from that time on, from a business point of view, has been without material interruption and he is now numbered among the most wealthy and successful manufacturers of the cities which cluster around the “Greater New York.”

The merits of his invention, which was not a mere accident, but the result of thorough study combined with native genius of high order, are fully attested by one of the Goodyear brothers, who first discovered the process of vulcanizing rubber, and who wrote of Mr. Albright that he deserved “more credit than any licensee that has ever taken up any branch of the hard rubber business.”

After his business success had become an accomplished fact, Mr. Albright was allured into politics and not only was he nominated for Congress, when, against great odds, he failed by only a small majority, but he was, several times afterwards, prominently brought forward as a candidate for governor of his state, and, had he consented to use the means commonly adopted in New Jersey, as well as in too many other places, to secure the election, his nomination, as well as election, would have been assured.

But the same resolute characteristics which carried him to success in his business career, firmly opposed all inducements to secure the nomination by any but honorable means, and the prize therefore fell to those who were less scrupulous in this regard. Like Henry Clay, who would “rather be right than be president,” he preferred to forsake political ambition rather than be governor with the loss of his

integrity as a man. Since that time he has occupied a position in politics above party lines, taking broad views of his own which have controlled his actions.

Unlike many men of fortune, since his days of prosperity have come to him, Mr. Albright has made liberal use of his means for his own comfort and for the public good. When the people of Dryden village were about determining to put in a system of water-works, he donated to them a beautiful fountain to adorn the common in his native town as a memorial for his father and mother. When the new log cabin was recently suggested as a feature of the Dryden Centennial Celebration, he sent in without solicitation, his check for thirteen dollars, to represent the thirteen members of his father's family in that enterprise.

Some of the marked traits of character of Mr. Albright are those which distinguish most self-made men of note. A strong and rugged constitution, developed by work on the farm, and life-long habits of temperance and regularity have enabled him to give untiring, personal attention to his business. His contact with men in all walks of life, and his custom of finding out all about every point involved, have given him an unusual knowledge of human nature, which has been of great value in the numerous negotiations and contracts in which he has been engaged, and has kept him from making many bad bargains. Although not trained as a mechanic, he has fine mechanical instinct, and quickly appreciates and understands machinery; and he has suggested a large number of improvements in the machines and processes of his factories.

His extensive litigation in the United States Circuit and Supreme courts, both as complainant and defendant, has given him a much better knowledge of the leading principles of the patent laws, evidence, and equity than one usually finds among laymen; and his less experienced friends among manufacturers often consult him on questions relating to the construction and extent of patent claims. His own experience of an inventor's troubles in perfecting an invention, getting his patent, and then sustaining it against infringers, has made him a close sympathizer with other inventors; and he has many times furnished lawyers' services and other substantial aid in developing their inventions and protecting their rights. Nothing in his life affords him more pleasure than the recollection that he has given such help to many deserving inventors.

While always ready to stand up for his rights, he is willing to give consideration to the wisdom and expediency of compromise where

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there appear to be conflicting rights. Gifted with persuasive speech, he has exceptional facility in conducting a negotiation. Swift in judgment and action, he does not waste time in over-consideration or needless delay. To many his manner, at times, is bluff, and, like all strong men, he is apt to appear too down-right and positive. But his employees, many of whom have been with him over twenty years, know that his heart is in the right place, and have a warm regard for him. He has never had a "strike," and he has never closed his factory, even when the recent hard times entailed loss by keeping it open. He preferred to suffer loss rather than to distress his faithful working men by shutting down.

These are some of the traits of character which have enabled the farmer boy of Dryden to become one of the truly useful leading men of his day, giving employment for many years to hundreds of men, and have made him one of the foremost citizens and widest known manufacturers of Newark, the Birmingham of America. In the eyes of practical men, one such citizen is worth more to the country than a hundred brilliant politicians. The inventor and manufacturer, he who produces in field or factory, is the citizen who chiefly adds to the wealth, prosperity, and happiness of the community in which he lives.

In October, 1878, Mr. Albright married, at Dryden village, Mrs. Almira D. Strong, widow of P. B. Strong, a soldier in the War of the Rebellion who died in the service. Two children, a son and a daughter, both now married, are the result of this union and both reside near their parents at Newark, N. J. A fine picture of the beautiful home of Andrew Albright has recently been presented to and now hangs in the Southworth Library at Dryden.

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