

The Town History Corner

by Harry L.D. Weldon, Town Historian

Many years ago in the Town of Dryden, NY there lived a man who was constantly “tweaking” things—always looking for the better way of getting the job done and to make life easier.

Elisha and Elizabeth (Smith) Albright were married there about 1818. Elisha had been to Dryden a year or so before where he had worked for his older brother-in-law, John Hiles, in a saw mill at the foot of Dryden Lake.

With a four-month old baby, they arrived with all of their possessions, including 60 dollars of specie (i.e. coin), having driven a one-horse wagon all the way from Belvidere, NJ. They set up residence in a log house on a north knoll opposite where the Assembly of God Church is now located. Later they moved to a plank house near the north outskirts of the village and then moved once again to a farm in the same area.

Another child was born in 1823 and on June 23, 1831, Andrew Albright. Then in 1832, Andrew’s parents purchased a homestead farm three fourths of a mile from the “Dryden four corners.” Here more children were realized for a total of eleven to be reared on what was at the time considered to be one of the best farms that had been developed from the wilderness in all of Tompkins County, NY.

This farm was noted for fruit as well as its grains and butter production. They raised a strain of Windsor Steele apple, which was much sought after by locals. Strong handed (i.e. hands and back) farming was the course of the day for the Albright family, although labor saving devices were not discouraged. The men of the farm developed an ingenious waterpower system to ease the work of threshing.

Andrew was one of the younger children and thence had the advantage of common schooling and stayed on the farm until he came of age. During this schooling, he developed the tenacity to look beyond the drudges of “strong handed” farm work.

As time passed, he tried his hand at inventing things. One such invention was a patent wagon brake, which was of “zilch.” One day while he was driving a horse wagon, it occurred to him that the use of hard rubber for the wagon-horse harness trimmings might be a better solution. Experts convinced him that this was impracticable and that it would be impossible to use rubber in such a manner. Undaunted, like any true inventor, he set out to prove them (i.e. the experts) wrong and achieved success and the desired result. However, like most inventors it is difficult to reap the rewards of their accomplishments. As soon as his ideas were made known, others would contest and not having funds to fight a legal battle he would lose out. However, his father saw the merits of his inventions and did support his efforts with the Goodyear brothers (of the Goodyear Rubber Co.) to win a final success.

Andrew became a successful businessman in his own right and acquired a number of patents. In later years he made the good folks of the Village of Dryden a gift of the original fountain between the two churches at the four corners. The one there now is a replacement (The original having been sold for scrap to “fight the axis” in World War Two).

In October 1878, Mr. Albright married the widow Mrs. Almira Strong. Throughout his life and marriage he continued to tinker, always making things better with a “tweak here and a

tweak there.”

See the Annual Report of the List of patentees of inventions, designs and reissues of 1867, entries #72,106 dated Feb. 12, 1867 for “covering harness trimmings with vulcanized rubber” by Albright, Andrew, Dryden and #64,419 dated May 7, 1867 for a “Mode of coating wood with rubber and gutta percha” by Holmes, K W, McGrawville and Albright, Andrew, Dryden.