

SMITHVILLE'S NEW YORK STORE: MORE TO THE STORY

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Part 1: The New York Store in Smithville Flats stood on the site of today's Huttleston's garage. It was part of the Harrison Block, which burned to the ground in March of 1881. When asked about the store's future, owner Edward Harrison said he didn't intend to rebuild "just at present."

The day of the fateful fire, Edward Harrison's brother, Arthur, was in Syracuse on a buying trip for his harness business. He was an expert harness maker, having learned the trade from his father, a Smithville saddler. Arthur's shop stood just north of the New York Store on Main Street in Smithville Flats and was part of the Harrison Block.

Also in Syracuse on the day of the fire was Greene's J. D. Van Valkenburgh, an insurance agent. Since some of the companies he represented insured the Harrison Block, news of the fire had been telegraphed to him. Arthur Harrison happened to meet Mr. Van Valkenburgh on a Syracuse street, and that's how he heard of the fire. He learned that his business, along with the New York Store, had been destroyed.

Arthur cancelled all the orders he had placed with Syracuse suppliers. He and the insurance agent traveled home together by train, arriving that evening to view the disaster in Smithville Flats.

Arthur Harrison took quick action. Within three weeks of the fire, he had put up a small new building on the site of his former harness shop and reopened for business. He sold his manufactured harnesses, saddles, and trunks, as well as other leather-related items: satchels, shoes, boots, and gaiters.

While Arthur was rebuilding, his brother Edward, owner of the burned-out New York Store, salvaged what merchandise he could, put sale prices on everything, and sold the items from a vacant house near his former store. Then he considered his future.

Edward's earlier comment to the *Chenango American* that he didn't intend to rebuild his store "just at present" turned out to be understated. Less than three months after the fire, the *Chenango American* noted that Edward Harrison had bought a building in Greene. In 1881, he moved his business and family to Greene, a community with a larger population base, and one with a railroad.

Edward sold groceries, feed, and cement from his new location, the family living on an upper floor of the building. They settled into life in Greene, where Edward earned respect as a businessman. Then four years later, in a grim reminder of Smithville Flats, his store, along with eight others, burned in a massive fire. Edward replaced it with a three-story building—this time, of brick—for his grocery store. As in Smithville, he named it the Harrison Block. Attached at the rear was a building he used for a feed mill (and later a chewing gum factory).

The Harrison family enjoyed a new home built on South Canal Street after the 1885 fire and summered at their cottage along the creek in Genegantslet. The brick Harrison Block still anchors one corner of downtown Greene, standing at Genesee and South Canal Streets.

Back in Smithville, the New York Store lot sat empty for ten long years after that fire. In 1891, Edward sold the 1/8-acre lot to James J. Flanagan for exactly what he'd paid twenty-five years before, \$100. Will Loomis remembered that when he went to school in the 1890s, the site was just a cellar hole left from the destroyed building.

The site was vacant, and maybe an eyesore, for at least twenty years. Sometime between 1900 and 1910, Walter Harrison (a distant Harrison cousin) built a blacksmith shop on the empty lot. Various

blacksmiths operated from that wooden building until tractors and automobiles replaced the need for horses, and therefore, blacksmiths.

In 1932, Linn Huttleston rented the blacksmith shop and transformed it into a garage, later buying the building. He sold gas and repaired cars and trucks there until 1971. Then his son Gary owned and operated the business for fifteen more years. Gary still uses the building and keeps it neatly painted and cared for.

As for the little harness shop Arthur Harrison built after the fire, it served the community in many ways for many years. First as Arthur's own shop, which he closed in 1884 ("Smithville's only industry," said the *Chenango American* when Arthur moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania). James Nichols continued a harness business at the same location. Then the building was used as a meat market, hardware store, feed store, Grange Hall, barbershop, courtroom, election location, and place for town board meetings. The building spent some of its final years as a dry goods and millinery store. The structure is gone now, sold in 1938. The buyer took it down and hauled the lumber away. Linn Huttleston later bought the empty lot, allowing him to enlarge his garage.

The New York Store, the little harness shop, and the blacksmith shop are part of Smithville's past. Now Huttleston's garage enhances the site. Changing needs, changing times, and changing landscapes: all weave the story of a community's history.