

*Nanticoke Valley Historical Society
of Maine New York*



*Norton Wagon Works
38 Nanticoke Road, Maine, NY
ca. 1840*



Nanticoke Valley Historical Society P.O. Box 75 Maine, NY 13802

For up-to-date news and information, please visit our website:
nanticokevalleyhistoricalsociety.com and our Facebook page

Suggested Donation: \$5.00

“It has been said that, at its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.”

William J. Murtagh, first Keeper of the National Register for Historic Places



The entrance way on the barn was added by Clement Bowers in 1939 when it was used by Janet Whitney Bowers for horticultural classes.

The first settlers arrived in this area around 1794. Land was for offered sale by the Boston Purchase Company of Massachusetts. The town of Maine was organized in 1848 and by then the population had grown to 1,800 people. The area consisted of old growth forest and the first industries were lumber and leather. The town served the farms which occupied the region after the forests were cut down. The farms were originally suited to growing grains and our Pitcher’s Grist Mill (ca. 1830) ground the local grain until 1955 when it closed. The soil was not fertile after about 40 years and the farms converted into dairy farms with local creameries serving the farmers.

Norton's Corner settled in 1794

Corporal Benjamin Norton (1751-1819) was born in Guilford, Connecticut. He served in the Revolutionary War (DAR Ancestor #A084710). He was Maine's first settler in 1794, having traveled from where he was born in Connecticut via Stockbridge, MA. He Settled about 1 mile north of the present town of Maine. His wife Lois Curtis Norton (1747-1804) was from Union Center, NY Their burial sight is not listed. They had several children: Amasa (1771-1844 (wife Deborah Rockwell), Issac (1778-1863) (wife Ruth S.), and, Eleazer (1778-1835) (wife Rachael C.). It is Eleazer's line that the Norton Wagon Works is associated with.

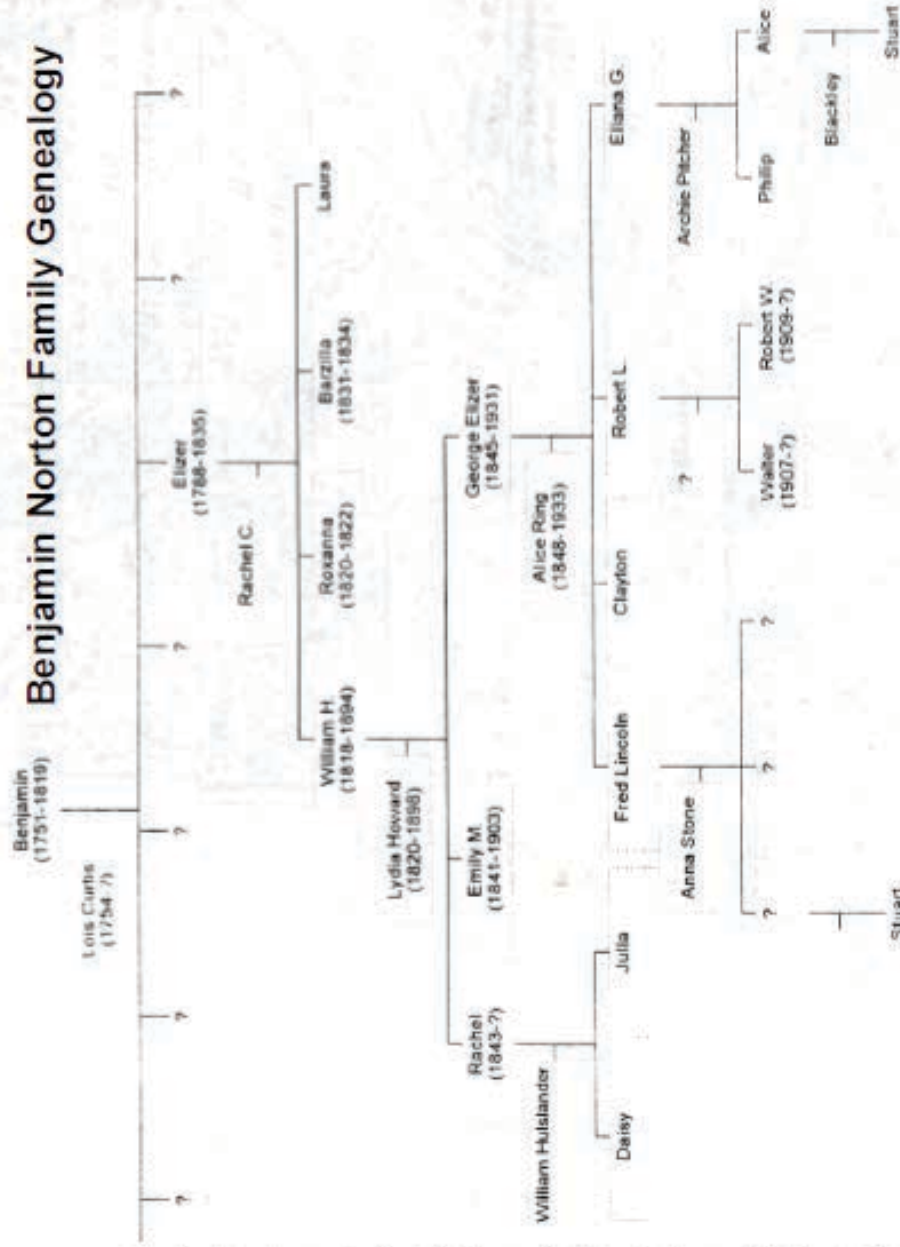


Figure A-1: The Norton Family Tree

“This week in New York’s American Revolution History...”

June 16, 1819 – Benjamin Norton, Revolutionary War veteran from Berkshire County, MA, prepares his Last Will and Testament in Maine, NY.

Benjamin Norton was born circa 1751, probably in Guilford, Connecticut to Thomas Norton and his wife Bethia. The book “Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War” Volume 11 (1903), by the Secretary of the Commonwealth has this entry for Norton’s wartime service:

NORTON, BENJAMIN. Corporal, Capt. Erastus Sargent's co., Col. Benjamin Simonds's detachment of Berkshire Co. militia; muster roll dated Ticonderoga, Feb. 25, 1777; enlisted Dec. 16, 1776; enlistment to expire March 15, 1777; also, same co. and detachment; enlisted Dec. 16, 1776; discharged March 22, 1777; service, 97 days, at Ticonderoga, including 7 days (140 miles) travel home; also, Capt. Job Woodbridge's co., Col. Brown's (Berkshire Co.) regt.; entered service July 8, 1777; discharged July 26, 1777; service, 19 days; company formed part of a detachment under Maj. Caleb Hide which marched from Stockbridge on the evacuation of Ticonderoga; also, Capt. Ebenezer Cook's co., Col. John Brown's (Berkshire Co.) regt.; entered service Sept. 22, 1777; discharged Oct. 14, 1777; service, 22 days, at the Northward.

The mother of Benjamin Norton’s children was Lois Wentworth Curtis, daughter of Elnathan Curtis of Berkshire County, MA. His second wife was named Phebe.

Benjamin Norton can be found in the 1790 census for Berkshire County, MA. It is said that in 1794, he moved to the area that is now the Town of Maine in Broome County, NY. It was then part of the larger Town of Union, Tioga County. In mid-June, 1819, Norton prepared his Last Will and Testament. Benjamin Norton died between June 16 and October 6, 1819.”

The link containing this excerpt from the “Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War” can be found at:

[https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=c_UQAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA527)

[id=c_UQAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA527](https://books.google.com/books?id=c_UQAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA527) For membership information, contact: SAR-Binghamton@hotmail.com



Lamont Bowers Sleigh

The Norton Wagon Shop

The Norton Wagon Shop and its barn were deeded to the Nanticoke Valley Historical Society in 1978, and the two buildings are in process of restoration. Upon completion, the Wagon Shop will show the process of assembly of horse-drawn vehicles, and the barn will serve as a display area for the Society's collections of farm and building tools.

George Norton (1845-1931) operated the Wagon Shop from the 1860's until the late 1920's. He followed his father, William Norton, who was a wagon maker on the same site.

The Norton Shop used standard forms. Seats, hardware, wheel hubs, and other components were purchased from specialized manufacturers. The Shop was equipped with a forge, painting and woodworking tools. George Norton and his two or three employees built the bodies and assembled and painted the vehicles.

A few words about the Norton Wagon Works
by Richards Barons and Ross McGuire (1979)

“There are few remaining remnants of early American industries except their products. Structures have burned, been abandoned, torn down or have been so denatured as to be totally useless to historians and researchers except for theatre.

The Norton wagon works is an exception. It is a remarkably complete structure which documents the organization and use of shop space in a late nineteenth century rural manufactory. Almost every element of the building from its construction details, subsequent modifications, the brush cleanings on the walls, wear patterns on the stair trends - provide tangible evidence of the use of this workplace.

We know of no other similar surviving complex. No wagon works has been preserved as an historic site. The wealth of evidence to be found throughout the Norton shops makes it an excellent prospect for the study and subsequent public interpretation of this important early industry. Every nail hole, wall peg, even the painted graffiti on the walls offers us clues to the understanding of the build, its use and the people who worked there.

Historians are trained to read documents to interpret the past, here besides an account book, the building is our document and we must read every elusive corner of it. The evidence is visible yet very fragile.”

The Norton Wagon Works closed in 1929 after the automobile took over the roadways. Prior to closing, the business would repair cars and make furniture. Many people continued to use sleighs in the winter months as the plowing of roadways was not good.

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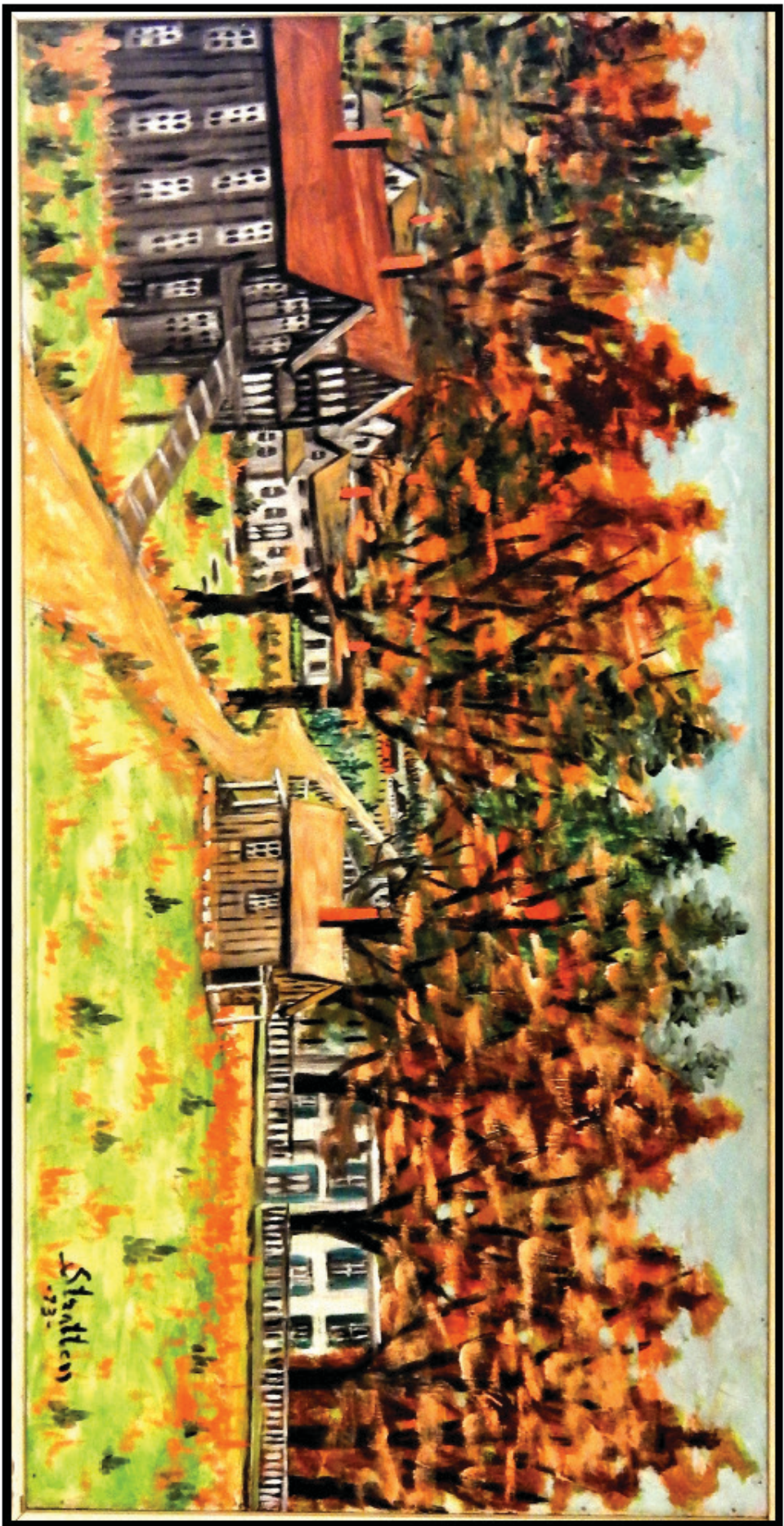
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This painting of Bowers Corners was painted by Clarence Stratton in 1973 and was donated to the Nanticoke Valley Historical Society by Mr. Rauscher in 2020. It shows Norton (or Bowers) Corners as it looked around 1870. The two Norton Wagon Works buildings are located at 38 Nanticoke Road: the west building (ca. 1840) and the east building (ca. 1876). The ramp on the west building was used to take the wagons to the 2nd floor for painting in a more dust-free environment. Originally a one-story building, the second floor was added around 1850. The second barn was moved from the Ransom property to the south around 1870. The Isaac Norton house (ca. 1810) is shown on the east side of Nanticoke Road. This building burned completely in 1918. Across the extension of Tiona Road is a building which served at various times as a blacksmith shop and a general store. It was demolished in 1879. The original Gardner Bowers home was constructed in 1822 and burned in 1870. It was re-built as it was originally constructed and still stands today. Mr. Clement and Mrs. Janet W. Bowers used the western building as a planting shed and location for lectures. The Norton Wagon Works buildings were donated to the Nanticoke Valley Historical Society in 1978 by their daughter Janet.





1899 image of the Norton buildings, looking south



The Norton buildings in 2014



Original Norton House (ca 1810) used as sugar shack and taken down in 1974 . (Sketch by Edward R. Pomeroy)



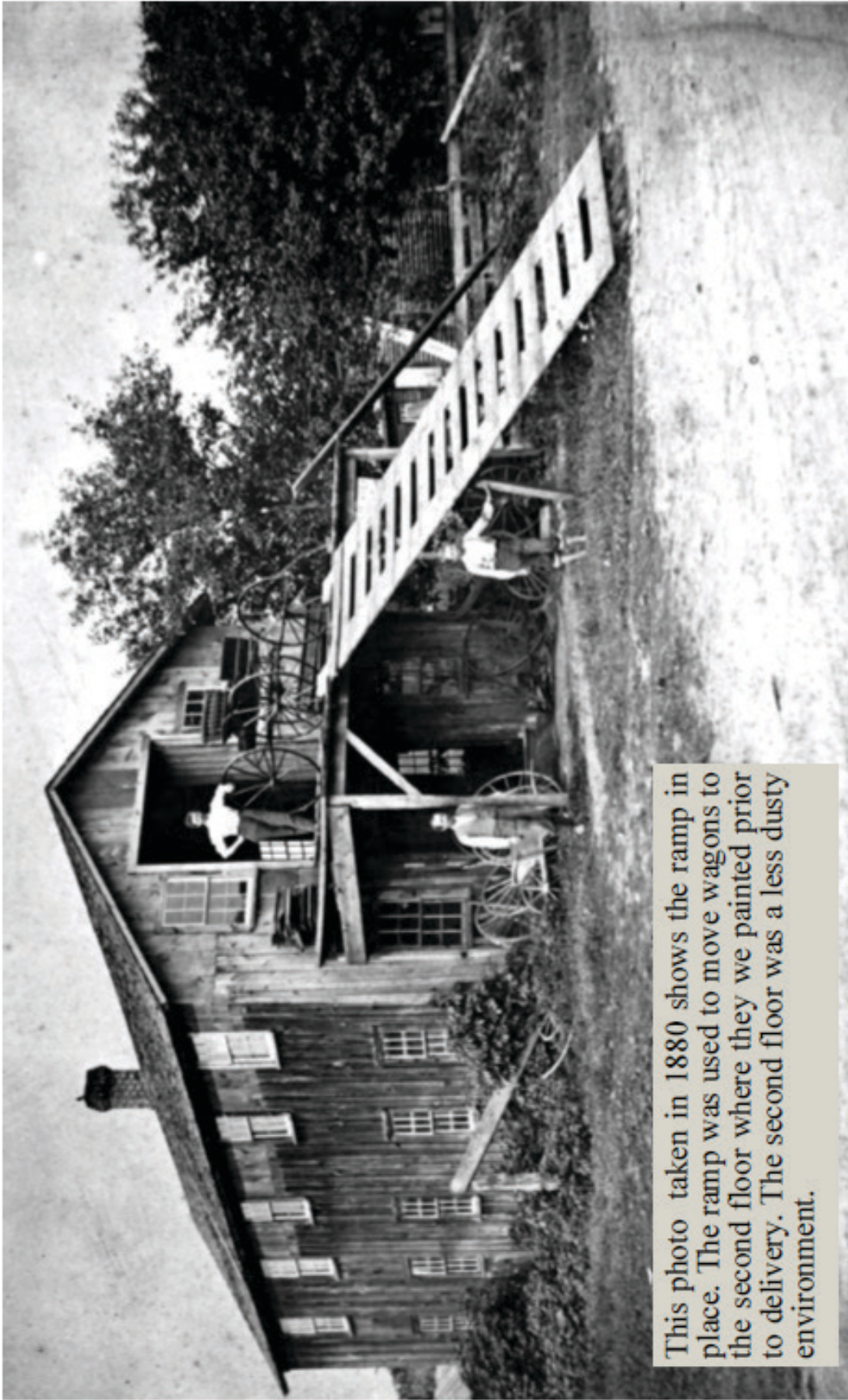
Norton home (ca. 1810) (photo 1936)

“Isaac Norton had a man named Mr. Ashley build him a house in about 1810 in Maine, NY. It was the oldest house still standing in 1973. It was 9 X 12 feet and was originally used as a dwelling until a larger house could be built. Then it was used to house the loom. The boards and nails were machine made. The door was a single wide board with cross pieces held by hand-wrought nails. The house consisted of a single downstairs room and loft put together with pegs. The latch on the only door once operated with a string, typical of primitive dwellings. It was then moved into a grove of sugar maples across the road and was used as a sugar house to boil sap.

About 1820 two buildings were built by the Norton family and used as wagon shops and furniture "factory". They were still standing in 1973 on an abandoned road segment in Bowers Corners area of Maine.” (*Al Parr, 1957*)

The Norton’s built a large home next to the western wagon works. This building burned down in 1918. This crossroad was called Norton’s Corners and later called Bowers Corners. The Stratton painting on pages 8 and 9 gives a view of this area around 1870.





This photo taken in 1880 shows the ramp in place. The ramp was used to move wagons to the second floor where they were painted prior to delivery. The second floor was a less dusty environment.



This is an 1866 map showing the town of Maine. Notice that both Lewis Street and McGregor Avenue had yet to be constructed. To the north is the location of Bowers Corners. The major north/south road is Nanticoke Road and at Tiona Road one could turn right (east) and cross Nanticoke Creek. Where Tiona Road meets Nanticoke Road was the home of G.S. Bowers, constructed around 1822. The home was totally destroyed by fire in 1873. The family rebuilt the house and one can still view this home today, located just a few hundred feet north of the museum.

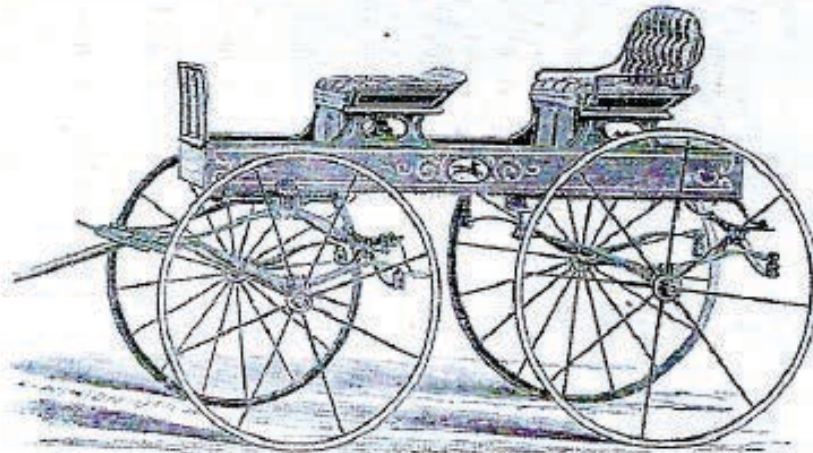
“Janet Whitney Bowers, wife of Clement, used the western barn for her horticultural projects. She became prominent as President of the Federated Garden Clubs of New York State, Inc., and until her death was on the State Advisory Committee and the State Awards Committee of that organization. She was a past officer of the Monday Afternoon Club, the



Janet and Clement Bowers 1968

Binghamton Garden Club, the Women's Auxiliary of the Susquehanna Valley Home board, and various other local organizations. She was a well-known lecturer and judge of flower arrangements, and for many years was chairman of judges on table arrangements at the International Flower Show in New York City.” The Bowers family bought the barns in 1939 and in 1979 their daughter Janet transferred the barns to the Nanticoke Valley Historical Society.”

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