

Charles A. Cheney

By Ray LaFlamme

Charles A. Cheney, benefactor of the Cheney Library and one of the most prominent entrepreneurs of early Hoosick Falls, was born on June 13, 1835 in Jamaica, Vermont and was son of Nathaniel Cheney. After being trained in the bookkeeping trade, he found employment with the firm of Thayer, Hawks, and Wilcox who operated a general merchandise store in Hoosick Falls on the corner of Main and John Streets in a brick building later known as Dougherty's, and accordingly moved to the Village. The firm dissolved in 1860 as Charles Hawks established an unrelated business in New York City and John Wilcox accepted a position with Walter A. Wood Company.

Adin Thayer entered into a partnership with Truman Wallace, continuing with the merchandising business moving to the North side of Classic Street in a building later to be known as the Quackenbush Block or Abel and Brown's store. Mr. Chaney remained as bookkeeper until the commencement of the Civil War in 1861. At that time, Cheney was courting Miss Mary Frances Ball, daughter of one of the leading personages of Hoosick Falls, Judge Levi Chandler Ball and his wife, Marcia Ann (Parsons) Ball, daughter of Seth Parsons. Judge Ball was a Paymaster in the U.S. Army located in Washington, D.C. and with patriotic fervor running rampant at the time Cheney decided to serve his country and became a clerk in the Paymaster's office and moved to Washington.

On October 21, 1862, Mr. Cheney married Mary Frances Ball, who returned to reside with him in Washington. Within the next two years they had a child who unfortunately died in infancy, although it was a commonplace occurrence in those days. After the Civil War ended in 1865 and his services in the Paymaster's office were no longer necessary, the Cheneyes returned to Hoosick Falls and he immediately found employment as a bookkeeper at the flourishing Walter A. Wood Company.

During the next several years and after the birth of a son, Albert Nathaniel in 1866, the intelligent, ambitious, and politically connected Charles A. Cheney advanced to Head Bookkeeper, Chief Auditor, and finally a Director of Walter A. Wood Company during Walter A. Wood's waning years. In addition, he served as Wood's confidential personal accountant and was named an executor of Wood's estate after Wood's death in 1892. He also became Treasurer of School District # 1, Hoosick, a position that was to last forty years. (District # 1, Hoosick, was the Hoosick Falls school district.)

In 1880, the First National Bank was chartered in Hoosick Falls. Supplemental to his duties at Walter A. Wood Company, Cheney was elected Vice President. This initiated his participation in the banking industry that he was to experience for the remainder of his life. In 1884, in association with his banking interests, he established the Cheney Block on the site of the Phoenix Hotel built by his father-in-law and presently the location of the Key Bank parking lot. During this period, he became President of the Maple Grove Cemetery; Treasurer of the Hoosick Falls Branch of the Mohawk and Hudson River Humane Society; officer of the Rensselaer County Republican Society; member of the Board of Directors of several local and county clubs including the Hoosick

Historical Society; His religious affiliation was with the First Baptist Church of Hoosick Falls where he was a Trustee, organist, and Superintendent of the Sunday School.

In 1886, tragedy struck the Cheney family when Albert N. Cheney, age twenty, the only remaining sibling, died of an undetermined cause while a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. This event profoundly affected the Cheney family as Mary Frances (Ball) Cheney subsequently lapsed into a severe state of depression that lasted until her death at the age of 59 on September 1, 1900 at their residence on Abbott Street in the Village of Hoosick Falls. Their home is currently the residence of Dr. Phillip Martinez.

In 1901, Cheney became significantly involved in the organization of the Peoples National Bank. In 1905 he succeeded John R. Quackenbush as president. He was also a Director of the Permanent Savings and Loan Association of which he became Vice President in January 1907. In 1906, he petitioned the State of New York Education Department for a Charter for a Village of Hoosick Falls Library that was officially opened on February 19, 1907. The Library was located on the second floor of the Municipal Building and Cheney was Treasurer and a Trustee of the Library Association.

On October 26, 1912, while still in excellent health for his age of 77, Charles A. Cheney was involved in an automobile accident on a Saturday evening at approximately 7:30 p.m. He was walking diagonally across Main Street between John and Classic Streets from Gillespie's store on the east side of Main Street toward Ely's store holding an umbrella during a driving rainstorm when he was struck by an automobile owned by Hoosick Falls resident Danforth Geer and operated by Williams College student Phillip Haywood who was visiting passenger and fellow Williams College student John J. Gillette. Mr. Haywood stated that they were going downtown on an errand and that they had just turned a corner heading south on Main Street and going slowly as he was unfamiliar with the locale. Mr. Cheney walked directly in front of the vehicle and Haywood stated he immediately sounded the horn and had the vehicle lights on but it was too late and the impact threw Cheney to the ground.

Mr. Cheney was immediately taken to the office of Dr. John T. Cahill, but at his insistence was taken to his home on Abbott Street. He was examined by Dr. Cahill and his personal physician, Dr. Putnam. It was determined that he had sustained various contusions, a concussion, scalp laceration, and a fractured rib causing internal injuries. Immediately after the accident, Haywood was taken to the police station and cited for violating unspecified New York State "automobile" laws. He appeared before Justice of the Peace Moon on the Tuesday following the accident but all charges were dropped when Moon and Coroner Hutton decided that no inquest was necessary as Haywood's version of what had occurred was corroborated by independent witnesses.

Actually, Mr. Cheney's condition became optimistic and he appeared to be recovering. However, he had a relapse the Monday following the accident when the internal injuries hemorrhaged. He went into shock and he succumbed to his injuries Tuesday morning October 29, 1912 and was pronounced dead by a specialist from Troy, Dr. Hudson. He was survived by a brother, George A. Cheney of Townsend, Vermont, and several nephews. In his will, which was dated on February 1, 1912 or eight months before his death, Cheney made provisions that bequeathed significant funds

for the establishment of a new Village Library that is still in existence. His total estate was \$200,000-250,000 and his largest single bequest was \$50,000 for the construction of a library. The new library was officially opened in 1923.