

## Seth Parsons

*Compiled by Philip Leonard, November, 1999*



Mr. Seth Parsons moved to Hoosick Falls in 1807 from East Hampton, Long Island. For the next thirty-six years he was “the leader in every movement for the betterment of the village and its people.”

Before arriving in Hoosick Falls, he had apprenticed and had become a master of several trades. These included cabinet maker, carpenter and millwright. He was knowledgeable of practical and theoretical mechanics. He was extremely interested in improving machinery and was naturally inventive.

He purchased three acres from John Potter on the west side of Main Street, on which he built his home. For the next five or six years he worked in his field of expertise. In 1811, he attempted to form a manufacturing company. He tried to make this a stock company but could not raise the interest of investors and fell short of the capital needed.

In 1812, he married Sally Ball of Wilmington, Vermont. They had eight children, five daughters and three sons. The last child was born in 1835. Their first child, Marcia, married Levi Chandler Ball in 1833. Chandler Ball later became a very important individual in the growth of Hoosick Falls. Another daughter Betsy married Walter A. Wood.

During the War of 1812, the *Embargo and Non-Intercourse Act* prevented the import of woolen goods. The need for domestic manufacturing of these products became clear. In 1814, Seth Parsons and his brother Hial purchased the shop and water power on the north side of the river, formally the wagon shop of John Manchester. Before buying the new site, Seth Parsons worked on improving the cloth shearing machine. He secured a patent for this type of machine and began manufacturing them. The design of his machine was so good that it remained in use for more than 75 years and became known as one of the best machines on the market.

This business was important not only as a profitable enterprise but also because it brought to the community a superior class of machinists and inventors. These people created prosperous conditions in Hoosick Falls during the latter part of the 1800s. Since men learned their trade at that time primarily by apprenticing, the Parsons plant attracted talented young men who wanted to apprentice. Many men moved from the area after apprenticing at the Parsons Manufacturing plant to become successful in other parts of the country. Mr. Parsons was highly respected by these men and “gratefully acknowledged the advantage derived from his instruction, and fatherly care.”

In 1814, Mr. Parsons was appointed as justice of the peace and commissioner of deeds by the Governor. He performed these duties for more than ten years in a manner that gave him the respect of the people in the community.

Up to 1822, the closest post office was at Hoosick Corners where the Hill Road now meets Route Seven. The Albany-Boston stage route stopped at Wilcox's at Hoosick Corners. The Government consented to establish a post office on the condition that no charge could be made for carrying the mail and no compensation paid for a postmaster. The whole expense for the office was paid for by Mr. Parsons for 10 to 12 years. He located the office in his shop and appointed David Ball his deputy. Andrew Parsons, a ten-year-old boy, was sworn in as post boy and made the 3-mile trip to Hoosick Corners on foot to get the depository of letters. It was not a bag but an upright case 20in x 18in x 9 1/2in.

Through the efforts of Seth Parsons, the Village was incorporated in 1827. He was elected the first Village President. At this time there were about 200 residents ( 96 children) with 36 buildings and a valuation of \$96,370.

Seth Parson's factory was in business until 1885. It provided stable employment for the village. Seth Parsons died in 1845 and the business was continued by his partner Lyman Wilder. His work on behalf of the village was carried on by his son-in-law, L. Chandler Ball. Hoosick Falls is indebted to this community leader.

Seth Parsons' son, James Russell, became a partner of Chandler Ball in the manufacturing of reapers and mowers in 1852. He later worked in management at the Walter A. Wood Company. He owned a large amount of property East of High Street. Seth Parsons original house, on Main Street, was moved to the second ward to make room for a home built by the Rev. George H. Nichols, Rector of St. Marks Church. Rev. Nichols home was across from St. Marks Church.