

Oliver and Jerusha Allen

by Lynne Belluscio

Visitors to LeRoy House have asked about the two empty frames in the back parlor. Usually Jerusha and Oliver Allen peer out from the ornate gold frames but a couple of months ago I took the portraits to Westlake Conservators in Skaneateles for an evaluation.

Oliver was a pale green and looked a little sick and Jerusha was surrounded by a dark cloud. The portraits are attributed to Phineas Staunton, who was the husband of Ingham University's founder, Emily Ingham. (You will remember that he is also the artist that painted the portrait of Henry Clay which now hangs in the United States Capitol.)

This week we learned that we were successful in obtaining a grant from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network to have Oliver and Jerusha restored. It will take a couple of months but they will look so much better when they return to their vantage point on the wall. The Allen portraits are part of a major collection on art, household furnishings, photographs and clothing that were donated to the Historical Society over a period of time from a prominent LeRoy family, the Olmsteds who were descended from the Allens. Jerusha and Oliver Allen's daughter, Elizabeth, enrolled in the LeRoy Female Seminary (later to be Ingham University) in 1843 and graduated in 1845.

It is believed that it is Elizabeth's connection to Ingham that prompted the portraits by Phineas Staunton. The actual date of the portraits is unknown. Oliver Allen died in 1848, the year after Phineas Staunton married Emily Ingham and became involved with the University.

Oliver Allen was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in 1798 and came to Canandaigua when he was seventeen. Jerusha Allen was born in 1800 in Rupert, Vermont and came to Canandaigua with her father, Dr. Silas Remington, a physician and her brother William.

Oliver Allen met Jerusha's brother William at the Higbee Woonen Mill in Canandaigua and in 1821 they built a woolen mill

along the Oatka Creek in Caledonia. A short time later, Oliver married Jerusha. They had two children, Oliver Allen II and Elizabeth. Allen moved his mill in 1828 to Mumford where he built a large stone building east of the center of town near the "Twin Bridges."

The mill was operated by two mill wheels, an indication of the immense size of the mill. This required a new half-mile mill race to be built to supply the new mill with head water. The race

was six feet deep and twelve feet wide and had to be dug by hand. It was the custom at the time to supply the workers with a daily ration of whiskey, but Allen was a staunch prohibitionist.

It was reported that Allen personally stood beside the barrel and dispensed the whiskey in tin cups and would say, "All right men, come and get your poison." The mill race was called Mary's (Merry's) Ditch but soon was known simply as "The Ditch." It was a favorite place for brook trout.

The mill office was built of the local marl and later became the office for the railroad, operated by Oliver Allen's son. (Later it was the home of Jay Baker on Armstrong Road and it is still standing, although the mill long ago fell into its foundation.) The Allens lived in a large house across the street from the mill. A large formal garden and trout ponds were part of the Allen homestead. (Now the home of Eric Baker and the Baker Greenhouses.)

Wool for Allen's mill was brought in from the surround-



Oliver Allen of Mumford by Phineas Staunton.



Jerusha Remington Allen of Mumford by Phineas Staunton.

ing country and sometimes a dozen wagons or more would arrive at the same time. The custom was that whoever came on the wagons would expect to stay for mid-day dinner and often there were quite a few men at the dinner table.

Another story concerned Silas Lawrence from Harris Road in LeRoy. Apparently Silas could tell a good story. All the men in the mill would take time off when Silas showed up so they wouldn't miss his wise cracks. "Old Si" was a wonderful mimic, full of anecdotes and dry humor.

The Oliver and Remington Mill produced all-wool flannels, suiting, dress goods and over

coatings which were manufactured under the trade name of "The Oatka Woolens."

In 1841, William Remington retired from the business and went into farming. After the death of Oliver Allen in 1848, his son and grandson continued the business until it closed in 1902. Oliver Allen and his wife, Jerusha were buried in Machpelah Cemetery in LeRoy. Their daughter, Elizabeth, whose portrait greets visitors as they enter LeRoy House, married John Randolph Olmsted and their son, Allen Olmsted, owner of Allen's Footease, donated LeRoy House to the LeRoy Historical Society.



Oatka Woolen Mill at Mumford, as it looked in 1860.