

HISTORY

— OF —

Little Nine Partners

— OF —

North East Precinct,

— AND —

PINE PLAINS, NEW YORK,

DUCHESS COUNTY.

By ISAAC HUNTING, Pine Plains, N. Y.

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JONAS KNICKERBACKER.

[See Lineage.]

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### HARRIS SCYTHES.

The scythe works at Hammertown was in its time the most important and extensive industry in this town. John Harris, the founder of the enterprise in Pine Plains at Hammertown, when about twenty years old commenced making scythes by hand on an anvil at the Andreas Rowe Corners, a half mile north of Shacameco station. The shop was owned by his uncle Joseph Harris, and was then in Amenia Precinct. Joseph Harris at that time owned a mulatto slave who was said to be a good scythe maker, and with whom John Harris had his first experience at scythe making. John Harris worked here about five years, meantime married Mary Gamble, and both emigrated about 1770 to Fort Ann, then an important military post about sixty-seven miles north east of Albany.

Each succeeding year after his settlement brought increased trial and danger to him, as also to all the settlers in the region of Lake Champlain. In constant danger of harm by the Indians, and the uncertain tenure of life and property incident to the then uncertain colonial struggle for existence, he—having a wife and children—became alarmed, and in the spring of 1777, before the winter snow had wasted, took what household goods he could load on an ox sled and started for the "Little Nine Partners" in Dutchess County. Not out of sight of his house he saw it burning—the work of the Indians. His wife had left a day or two previously on horse back with her two daughters—all on one horse—the eldest about three years old. She arrived at her destination safely several days in advance of her husband, and to her last years related the incidents of this journey with vivid interest to her relatives and friends. John Harris also made his return safely to the old shop at the Andreas Rowe Corners, then supposed to be in the "Little Nine Partners," but upon the permanent location of the boundary line between the two patents a few years later it was in the territory of the "Great Nines." The shop was on the north side of the corners a short distance from the combined stable and carriage house now there. Meantime, during the absence of John Harris at Fort Ann, scythe making had been continued at this shop by Joseph Harris and his mulatto slave and the scythes sold in southern Amenia and other adjacent points. A portion of the steel, possibly all, used in their manufacture was purchased at the "Steel Works," near now Wassaic, which was then (1776) made by Captain James Reed and a Mr. Ellis from the iron in pigs from Livingston's Ancram Furnace, which was carted to the Steel Works at ten shillings for twelve hundred pounds. Steel sold for a shilling a pound



HARRIS SCYTHE WORKS. 1850.

at retail, one hundred pounds for twenty dollars, and refined steel twenty-five dollars a hundred. The revolutionary war stopped the importation of iron and steel, and gave impetus to home manufacture. Hence the high price of iron and steel. Captain James Reed who manufactured steel had a store, and in 1776 purchased scythes of Joseph Harris at eighty-four shillings a dozen, paying for them in steel and retailing them at ten shillings each. They were called "Harris Scythes," and from this fact Col. Silas Harris when he became a manufacturer of scythes a half century later, pasted a printed label on each scythe having the legend "Established in 1776." But it is not generally known that the Harris scythes of 1776 were made at Andrus Rowe Corners by "Joseph Harris, blacksmith," as proprietor.

John Harris worked here at scythe making six years after his return from Fort Ann, when the revolutionary war having ended, he in 1733 purchased of Adam Snyder, in Pine Plains, one hundred acres which is the "old Harris farm," west of the Harris mills, now (1897) owned by Anthony H. Barton. This purchase included the sawmill and the dwelling opposite, which is the "old Harris house" now repaired. The grist mill property he purchased four years later, on which in 1808 a "new" grist mill was built which is the present grist mill, formerly called "Harris Mill."

John Harris made scythes at a shop near the saw mill house when he first came there, and later had a shop below the grist mill. About 1786, Hugh Gamble, a brother of his wife, came as an apprentice, he being then about eighteen. Edmond Reynolds, later a well-known farmer, entered the shop about that time, and Mrs. Harris affectionately called him "one of my shop boys." Later in life he made scythes on his own account on the present Isaac Carman farm, principally for his own use.

About 1790, a race was cut on the east side of the Shacameco commencing near the now Anthony H. Barton residence, extending to near the present residence of Mr. Slingerland at Hammertown, where shops were established at the foot of the hill east of the house. The highway then was at the foot of this hill winding easterly to the bridge on the now highway. Thus the shop was on the highway. Harris and Gamble made scythes at these shops several years. About 1810, Seth Harris, from Kingsbury, N. Y., another branch of the family, took a financial interest in the business with John Harris. Before leaving Kingsbury he had buried his wife, Isabella Gamble, sister to the wife of John Harris. They had three children, John, Silas and Elizabeth, who came with them. John and Silas became interested in scythe making.

Better facilities for making scythes were needed to meet the increased demand, and upon the coming of Seth Harris and sons a site was secured on the west side of the stream now indicated by the ruins, and a race or ditch cut leading thereto on the west side to intersect the main stream about eighty rods above the shops. A dam was built at the new site and a

frame building or shop erected near the present highway bridge, a trip hammer placed therein and used for the first time in the manufacture of the Harris scythes. The shop already mentioned on the east side under the hill was used in connection with the one on the west side, for turning and finishing, which as yet was done by hand.

About 1812 Cyrus Burnap entered the shops of the Harris Company at a salary of \$500 a year. He was a master workman and used the trip hammer. The business continued without any change of note until 1814 when John Harris and Hugh Gamble deceased, Gamble on the first of January, and Harris November 27, 1814.

The business was now left to Seth Harris and his two sons, John and Silas. John was an ingenious and skilled workman, but Silas was never a practical workman. About 1816 the stone shop was built, and a finishing trip put in, which made two trip hammers in the works. This building was 23 x 30, and besides the trips had a grindstone. It is the building to the right in the cut, with a small cupola. The finishing shop on the east plant, near the now Slingerland residence, was also used in connection with the shops on the west plant. Solomon Ferris, John Deuel and John Hall were principal finishers, and among their helpers was Ludlow E. Lapham, then a lad, who later moved to Penn Yan, N. Y. John Hall also at times worked in the frame shop on the west plant, and Cyrus Burnap used the finishing trip in the stone shop. At this time about five hundred dozen scythes were made annually. The grinding of the scythes was divided between the works for that purpose in Ancram near the "Delamater place" and the shop here according to convenience and the supply of water. Little change took place in the business from 1817 to 1820, except the abandonment of the plant on the east side. John Harris had meantime married a daughter of William Righter, and Silas Harris, (Colonel, as he was called,) had married Maria, a daughter of Edward Puggsley. John lived in a dwelling on the side hill opposite the Peter Husted dwelling, and Silas in the old Harris house opposite the now Slingerland home, then the residence of Joshua Culver. Financial embarrassment came about this time. Seth Harris retired and continued in the same business at Salisbury, Conn., with one James Harris, with whom he was a partner, leaving the work here to his sons John and Col. Silas. [Note.—The Hudson Bee has this notice: James and Seth Harris's Scythes for sale by Rufus Reed, Hudson, May 31, 1814.] Cyrus Burnap left at this time and went to farming.

Soon after this Col. Silas Harris became sole manager and proprietor and all the manufacturing was done at the west plant. The hammers were kept in motion and the financial struggle passed. John, his brother, remained as foreman eight years, and among the principal workmen meantime were John Hall, Solomon Ferris, John Deuel, James Deuel, Ludlow E. Lapham, John Bevans and Lewis Germond. The place was literally *Hammer Town*.

In 1828 John Harris retired from the works, went to Winsted, Conn., and made scythes, and harpoons for whaling vessels. He moved from Winsted to North Carolina and engaged in lumbering and making stoves for the sugar trade. Later he moved to Albany, and kept a restaurant under the Exchange. He deceased in Albany. John Hall succeeded John Harris as superintendent. Col. Harris had meantime (from '20 to '28) taken an interest in the Salisbury plant, and some of the workmen at Hammertown had moved there, among whom were Solomon Ferris, who had married a daughter of Hugh Gamble; and her two brothers, Isaac Gamble and Jas. H. Gamble.

In 1832, under the supervision of Col. Harris, the race from the west plant leading to the main stream above was enlarged, and improvements made in the flumes at the shops. In 1835 further improvements were made. A brick shop thirty by fifty-four was erected, and two trips placed therein. (This is the front large building in the cut.) To this on the south end was added a finishing room twelve by twenty-four. In the gable fronting the road of this main brick shop was placed a marble tablet about 18 inches square, on which was cut "1835," the date of its erection. These improvements left the "Old Stone Shop" undisturbed. The scythe making works was then thoroughly organized by Col. Harris. James Deuel was superintendent in the shops. Skilled workmen were employed, consisting principally of Milton Germond, Charles Ross, Willis Hurlburt, Caleb Birdsell, Cornelius Knickerbocker, John Bevans and Francis Brown. Jonas Knickerbocker entered the shop at this time as an apprentice. The old trade mark was still stamped in the heel of the scythe with the letters "S. H." in the heart in the place of the former "J. H." Printed labels were also pasted on the scythes having this inscription:

Established 1776.

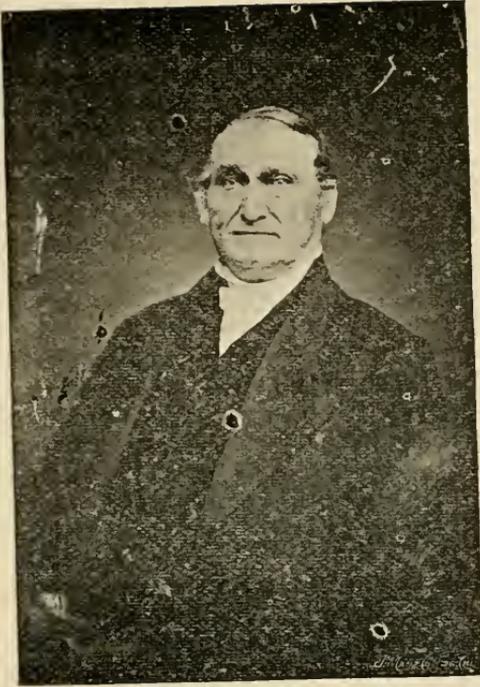
**SILAS HARRIS'**  
Best Steel Back  
*Full Set Grass*

**SCYTHES.**



*Manufactured at the Old  
Establishment,  
PIKE PLAINS,  
Dutchess County, N. Y.*

To increase the facilities for grinding, Col. Harris secured a site about three and a half miles southeast from Pine Plains on the now Isaac Halleck farm where "Grinding Works" were erected. The building is now standing and the "ditch" that led the water can be traced. He purchased land on Stissing Mountain for the wood it bore to convert into charcoal. The smoke from the burning pits went heavenward during the day, and at night their fire flickerings were seen miles away, while the still valley was filled with that charcoal odor which enthusiastic colliers delight to call "healthy." Wood choppers, colliers, teams and teamsters had each a niche to fill in this imperative transportation of coal and iron to Hammertown where the trip hammer, the fire and the water converted iron and steel into util-



COL. SILAS HARRIS.  
[See Lineage.]

ity for man. Skill was only needed, and with that the men stood armed at the forge and the anvil. To harmonize, combine and keep in motion these elements—things animate and inanimate—in this particular industry was the special work of Col. Harris. The clatter and bustle in Hammertown for a quarter of a century succeeding 1835 is evidence unimpeachable of his business ability in this regard.

James Deuel remained superintendent until 1842, when he retired and went to Central New York, where he deceased. February second the same year Seth Harris deceased in his eightieth year, but he had retired from the business several years before his death. John Bevans, an experienced workman, succeeded Mr. Deuel as superintendent, which position he held until his death in April, 1849—seven years. During these fourteen years—1835 to 1849—ten to twelve hundred dozen of scythes were made annually.

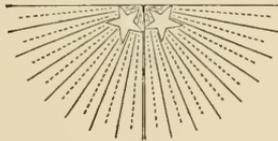
In the fall of 1849, Mr. Jonas Knickerbocker, (see cut page 159) who, after serving an apprenticeship in the Hammertown shops had moved to Saratoga County, returned to Pine Plains and became an equal partner with Col. Harris in the Hammertown plant and also in the Harris plant at Salisbury. He remained, however, at the Hammertown shops as superintendent, Col. Harris superintending the outside matters. The principal mechanics at this time were Joseph Gee, — Rice, Philo Barton, Stephen Miller, Walter Ferris, Henry Turner, Milo Knickerbocker and Hiram Krinkle. In 1850 this plant turned out fifteen hundred dozen scythes. Harris and Knickerbocker continued the business as partners twelve years, the partnership terminating at the decease of Col. Harris, April 19, 1862.

Colonel Silas Harris was comprehensive and far-reaching in his business views and inclined to embrace more in his estimates than the means at hand could accomplish; more liable to over estimate than to fall short, yet whatever it was he worked to accomplish his undertakings. He was a good organizer, and had the energy and concentrative mental ability to focalize all things on the object desired. He controlled the seemingly uncontrollable by the force of his will and personal magnetism. Yet he was not combative, nor took pleasure in compulsion by power and opportunity. On the contrary he was kind hearted, generous, social and hospitable. He was possessed of a comfortable estate at his decease, the result of his wisdom, industry and economy. His widow deceased June 16, 1877. They had two daughters, Margaret—Mrs. Luquere—who deceased in 1896, and Mary, who married Theodore Pomeroy, of Pittsfield, Mass. She deceased several years since, leaving four children. As Miss Harris she was remarkably beautiful in person, and equally beautiful and lovely in character.

At the death of Colonel Harris Mr. Knickerbocker occupied the shops under a lease from the heirs of Colonel Harris for two years and continued making scythes, using the following label inscription:

“1776                      Steel Back  
 CHAMPION MIRROR BLADE.  
 The best that can be found,  
 If properly used and ground.  
 Jonas Knickerbocker,  
 Pine Plains, Dutchess Co., N. Y.  
 Grind equal on both sides.”

At the expiration of this lease he failed to make any further arrangement for the property. The shops were unoccupied, and with the other Harris property were sold to Mrs. Giles H. Duxbury in 1879. Decay and dissolution meantime had been doing their work. The trip hammers had been still a dozen years or more, and no force or power had come to revive them. The roofs were mouldering and the walls were crumbling. Ruin had been making her dwelling, not greenly, for no trellised vine was there to screen her work, but ruin, dry, gaunt, naked, starved. Practical life is sterner than sentiment, and hard cash of more utility than treasured memories of the past. Twenty-eight thousand brick were sold from the brick shop walls in 1879. Fifteen thousand of these went into the dwelling of G. G. Titus, now (1897) owned by William Bostwick. The remainder of the twenty-eight thousand were piece-mealed to chimneys and furnaces and patches of need. Stone for the basement walls of the late addition to the Presbyterian church of Pine Plains was hauled from here, and monuments in the evergreen cemetery have foundations made from the stones in these ruined walls. Only ruin is left to mark an industry which had its beginnings a hundred years ago, and even that is being hauled away.



name appear in the town records much later. May 12, 1763, Epenetus Ketchum has an ear mark recorded in the town book "which is a slit in the end of the left Eare," and was recorded by Elisha Colver, Sen., one of His Majesty's Justices.

**Knickerbocker.**—There have been many families of this name in this town and vicinity for a century and a half. Harman Jansen Knickerbocker born in Friesland, Holland, who came to America about 1670 and settled at Fort Orange, Albany, is said to have been the American ancestor. His wife was Elisabeth Van De Bogart whom he married in Albany. They had five sons and two daughters born in order named: Harman, Lawrence, Cornelius, Jane, Evert, Pieter and Cornelia, who married John Vosburgh, who with some of the Knickerbocker brothers at Sundry times from 1704 to 1723 purchased lands of Peter Schuyler lying in his patent in Red Hook around Tivoli and Madalin and settled there. The Vosburgs and Knickerbockers of that vicinity are their descendants. Harman of the above brothers drifted to the lower Oblong valley and settled on the late Joseph Belden farm near the border of Amenia and Dover where he deceased in 1805, aged 93, and was buried in the family burial yard near the Belden residence. The Beekman Knickerbockers are said to be his descendants. In 1711 he deeded lands in south part of Amenia to Cornelius Knickerbocker who later, in 1743, was living in Salisbury, Conn., on a farm which in 1748 he exchanged with Capt. John Sprague on Gay street north of Sharon near a pond, which was called "Knickerbocker's Pond." He deceased there 1776 aged eighty-four. Lawrence of the above brothers had a son Peter who married Margaret Bain and settled near Mount Ross. He had sons Philip, Lawrence, Peter, Benjamin, James, John, Hugh and daughters Elisabeth and Margaret. Margaret married Hugh Rhea, a prominent man in his time in old North East. Benjamin of the above brothers had a son Benjamin who was the father of Henry B. Knickerbocker a successful farmer now living about three miles east of the village. Hugh, another brother, married Rachel Stickle and had sons, Peter, John, Valentine, Hugh, Frederick, Benjamin, William, Henry and daughters Elisabeth, Mary, Margaret, Nancy and Adaline, thirteen in all. Many are the descendants of this family in name and by marriage by other names. James another brother above married Maria Dennis and are the parents of the late Jonas Knickerbocker of the village, (See cut p. 159). He was for many years a partner with Col. Silas Harris in the manufacture of the Harris scythes (see Harris Scythes) and after the decease of Col. Harris continued the business above for about two years. He then built a store building at the Duchess Railroad Depot, now occupied by John Hedges, and kept hardware principally. He retired from the store in 1886, and from active business having in his life time accumulated a competence.

His wife was Miss Jane C. Drake, daughter of Samuel Drake of Amenia. She deceased March 9, 1895, and he deceased March 10, 1896, aged eighty-two, each at the home in Pine Plains. A daughter and a son are now living in the parental dwelling.

**Lillie.** James, son of David, a farmer of Litchfield, Conn., came to Pine Plains in 1813, and entered the law office of Stephen Eno as a student and clerk. Not long after coming here he married Clara Couch, daughter of John Couch (see lineage) a sister to the wife of Justus Booth who came to Pine Plains in 1809. Mr. Lillie after his marriage moved to Canaan, Conn., lived there two or three years, then returned to Pine Plains and lived in a small house on the site of the now Charles Wilber dwelling, where he deceased in 1838. His children were Helen, Joanna, and John Whitfield. Joanna married Hiram Wheeler of Pine Plains, John Whitfield went to Pokeepsie, was a merchant and deceased in 1881. Helen married Rufus White, a harness maker at Pine Plains. He was born in Milan, worked at his trade with William Wooden of Pine Plains, and commenced on his own account as successor to Isaac Hammond in the building on the now Charles Morgan corner, and later in a building west of the now Opera House which he occupied for about five years, then went to Milan where later he deceased. His wife deceased in 1892, and they have descendants. Mr. Leonard F. Requa, of the "Insulated Wire Co.," of New York, married a daughter.

**Lewis.** Israel, Daniel and Jonathan, three brothers, the first of the name in this vicinity settled in northern Stanford about 1765. Israel and Daniel purchased lands in the Great Nine Partners, containing nearly all of the respective farms of the late Phineas K. Sackett, and the late Ezra B. Hoag and the now Judge Barnard farm at Attlebury Station. Israel lived on the Phineas K. Sackett farm, and he and his family are said to have been buried in the old cemetery east of the Sackett Corners. Their headstones are gone excepting one there 1880 to Daniel I. Lewis. Daniel, one of the three brothers, lived on the now Judge Barnard farm at Attlebury.

**Lewis.** Israel, his children, Israel, Benjamin, George, Daniel I., Jemima, one other daughter who married John Rowe of Milan. George married a Miss Wooley, and each deceased of the epidemic of 1812. Israel never married. Benjamin never married, was executor to the estate of his brother George. He deceased about 1814. Jemima married Henry Stewart, a weaver. They had a daughter Catherine who deceased in 1795, at the age of ten years. Her father deceased in 1820, aged 72, and the mother in 1826, aged 59. The three were buried in the old cemetery east of Sackett Corners.

**Lewis.** Daniel, his children, Daniel, Jonathan, Phebe and Hannah. Phebe married Isaac Smith, Esq., of Federal Square, son of Judge Isaac. Hannah was the second wife of Gilbert Thorne, of Stissing, (his first wife