

The Lovell Family in the Town of Elmira

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The Lovell family home at 1648 West Water Street, currently owned by Florence Lovell, has been in the Lovell family since it was purchased in 1870 by Reuben Lovell. Florence and her late husband William and their family have lived in the house since the early 1970's. Florence Lovell's mother-in-law, Gertrude (Bower) Lovell, grew up on the Bower farm on Coleman Ave (Bower Road is named after her family) and she was the historian in the Town of Elmira for a number of years. Gertrude also operated a tea room called The Maples at the Lovell home in the 1930's. Florence and her family have done an excellent job of preserving this very impressive home.

Reuben Lovell was a Big Flats tobacco farmer and he purchased the West Water Street farm from William T. Post, a NYS Assemblyman and Elmira Post Master. The property, at that time, consisted of a 62 acre farm which was located from Water Street north up the hill to the top of Lovell Avenue. The home has been in the Lovell family for nearly 150 years which is a very rare occurrence in this day and age. The home which was originally built in 1829 is one of the oldest homes in the Town of Elmira and was built using post and beam construction. Reuben Lovell was an established tobacco farmer growing tobacco first in Big Flats and then in West Elmira. Reuben also owned a tobacco warehouse on north side of West Second Street west of Hoffman Street where the Hoffman-Foster Apartments now stand. Many people don't realize how large an industry tobacco farming was in Chemung County for over 100 years beginning in the 1840's. Three Lovell brothers Reuben, George and William H. pioneered the tobacco farming industry in the area and William went on to work for one of the largest tobacco companies, the John Brand Company. In 1855 George Lovell was recorded as producing 12,000 lbs of tobacco from 11 of the 30 acres of land devoted to tobacco farming. By the 1870's tobacco was a major cash crop in Elmira, Big Flats, Southport and Chemung NY with 60,000 lbs being produced. At the peak there were 200 growers of tobacco producing up to 100,000 lbs of tobacco per year and with over 1,000 people in the county engaged in manufacturing cigars from the tobacco. It is no surprise to see early county settler names like Lovell, Minier, Hoffman, Brand, Sly, Baldwin and Beckwith with their names associated with tobacco farming. In 1898 a strip of land was deeded from the original Lovell property to enable the extension of Church Street from Wall Street to the point.

Writer's Note: I continue to look for historic subjects (people, places, homes, historical events, old schools, family history, etc.) about the Town of Elmira to write about. If you have any suggestions or information for future articles please e-mail them to me at demingsw@yahoo.com or call me at 607-732-1177.



The Lovell Home in the late 1800's with the tobacco barns in the background



The Lovell Home in October 2018