

Fredonia's Shirt Factories  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2011

Francis (Frank) A. **Cottrell** was born in Hartfield NY on 30 August 1837. He became a miller working at Mayville, where he married Mary Alma **Beaujean** on 11 April 1860. He also worked as a miller in Laona. Soon after M. M. **Fenner** began his People's Remedies business in 1872, **Cottrell** was hired. He became foreman until 1892, after which he began working as a traveling salesman for the business. While on the road in 1893, he contracted malaria, from which he died in October 1894.

It must have been at least as early as 1892 that he had begun another business on the side, manufacturing shirts as the Fredonia Shirt Co. (There is an item in *The Fredonia Censor* of 22 March 1893 that refers to it, in passing, as an established firm.) The **Cottrells** lived at what would be 42 *West Main Street* today, with the shirt factory at 40 *West Main Street*. The business is still listed in the 1895 Business Directory, but not in 1896 or after. An advertisement in the *Censor* of 15 May 1895 for the J. C. **Birdsall & Co.** clothing store at today's 4 *West Main Street* offers 5 dozen "Custom Made Shirts from the Fredonia Shirt Co." That suggests it had been a sizeable operation with that many shirts still left seven months after **Cottrell's** death.

Back in March 1893, a competing business was begun. The Columbia Shirt Factory began on the third floor of "**Scott's** building," probably Frank W. **Scott's** hardware store building at 8 *West Main Street*. The partners were E. and W. **Maibour** "and **Fisher** of Buffalo," who had taken in "Mr. **Weber**, recent foreman of the Fredonia Shirt Co." That was Henry M. **Weber** "shirt cutter." By August of 1893 the partnership was dissolved and the business was to be run by W. H. **Maibour** alone. There is no record of any **Maibour** or Columbia Shirt Co. in the directories or the newspaper after this date. Instead there was H. M. **Weber's** "Fine Custom Shirts" at 5 *East Main Street*, on the second floor over **Belden** and **Leworthy's** store. **Weber** had electric power at his shirt factory and "makes fine garments to order." The business is listed in the 1896 Directory, but not in 1898, nor is **Weber** himself listed as a resident after 1896. There are clothing stores listed in later directories, but not the factories that specialized in custom-made shirts.