

Dr. Alexander Wolfers and Robert Wolfers the Architect: Selected Records  
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Alexander Wolfers (1809 - 1872) and Robert Wolfers (1816 - 1897) were brothers from a large German-Jewish family. Their father Wolf Philipp Wolfers was from the small market town of Diepenau, Kingdom of Hannover.

Dr. Alexander Wolfers and Elizabeth Ann Hewes (Hughes)

Alexander seems to have arrived in the United States in 1835, although the first record of his location is his declaration of intent to become a citizen (his "first papers"), made in Erie PA on 3 August 1836. However, at some time in the following year, he moved to Fredonia NY, where an advertisement in *The Fredonia Censor* of 20 September 1837 recommended Dr. Wolfers "late of Erie, Pennsylvania." In 1838, Pennsylvania authorities transferred his "first papers" to the Chautauqua County court house.

The *Censor's* recommendation for Alexander had been signed by a Dr. James Birnstall, who was identified as a "German Physician in Westfield." Both Alexander and Birnstall advertised themselves as homeopathic physicians, a new theory of medicine espoused by the "German physician" Samuel Hahnemann. Some aspects of homeopathy were an improvement upon archaic practices of the early nineteenth century, while other aspects of the new theory were just as unhelpful if not dangerous.

In late September 1837, Alexander opened an office "in Mr. Norcott's." By the end of November, he was located "in the west front room" at the Eagle Street hotel of L.C. Hunn." In September 1838, he moved to "the third house on Main Street west of Canadaway Creek." He was still there in February 1839, when he announced that he indeed had a degree from the University of Halle in Prussia, which he had had recorded at the Court House in Mayville NY, although that record does not seem to exist.

In November he moved his office once again, this time to the Union Hotel of A. Pierce, Water Street. On 1 January 1840, Alexander married Elizabeth Ann Hewes (1821 - 1886), oldest daughter of Edward and Eunice Hewes of Eagle Street, and Alexander soon moved his office to the home of his in-laws.

Edward Hewes (Hughes) had been born in Maine in 1793. His wife, Eunice Thompson, whose brothers, Jonathan and Ezra Thompson, also became residents of Pomfret, was born in Massachusetts in 1802. According to the 1865 state census, the Hewes had eleven children. Elizabeth Ann was born in Ohio, which indicates that the young couple had migrated there from New England.

Edward's obituary stated that he and his family came to Fredonia in 1825, although it must have been after 1 July, the date of the state census, in which Edward did not appear. Elizabeth's brother Edward, Jr., was born in 1826 in Chautauqua County. The Hughes & Clough "new meat market at the Cascade Hamlet," which was announced in *The Fredonia Censor* of 23 May 1828, may have been one of Edward Hewes' early ventures.

Another brother of Elizabeth was William, born in 1823, probably in Ohio. He died at the age of four in Fredonia on 16 May 1827. The rest of Elizabeth's siblings, as noted in various censuses, were all born in Fredonia: Rhoda (1830), Pamela (1832), Julius (1834), Sobieski P. (1837), Lucius E. (1839), Edward (Eddy) A. (1840), and two others whose names are not known at this writing.

Edward Hewes must have rented a place to live at first since he did not appear in the town of Pomfret assessment rolls until 1830, when he bought a lot on the southwest side of Eagle Street. He could have been renting that same property prior to 1830. It was purchased from Isaac Thompson of Arkwright, possibly a relative of Eunice Thompson Hewes. Although the record is sparse, Hewes' occupation was usually given as "grocer." The typical pattern for a merchant was to live behind or over his shop until he could afford to move his family to a separate residence. That separate residence is probably what Hewes bought on Gillis Street from Thomas Gillis in 1852.

Elizabeth A. Hewes attended the Village's district school, and then the Fredonia Academy for one year in 1839. She and Alexander were married by the Universalist minister Rev. T. C. Eaton from the Town of Portland. Two years later, in April 1842, their eldest daughter Louisa was born, at which point they moved to their own home on the Nelson Osborne farm "1 1/2 miles west of Fredonia on the Main Road."

Alexander Wolfers, in addition to his medical practice, received notice in *The Fredonia Censor* of 4 October 1843 for the translation of a poem that was submitted "too late for this week." Unfortunately, it seems never to have appeared in that paper. A few months later, in January 1844, he was announced as giving a lecture "on Homoeopathia" at the Milford School House. Milford is known today as Lamberton, not far from his home on West Main.

By then, he was no longer an alien, but a new American citizen. In October 1842, Alexander was granted citizenship at the county court house. It was on 11 October, the same day that his younger brother or half-brother Robert took out his own first papers. This is the first appearance of Robert Wolfers in local records, and he may well have only recently arrived in the United States.

In 1846, Alexander and his family moved to Centerville NY, and by 1855, they had relocated to Dunkirk NY. The 1860 census, the 1865 census, and the Civil War special assessment rolls of 1863 and 1865 showed the family still in Dunkirk. However, in October 1860, Alexander's children had been declared "paupers," and were indentured to their grandfather Edward Hewes. Edward remained their guardian until each child became 21. Yet, the censuses of both 1860 and 1865 show the children living with their parents in Dunkirk in spite of the legal arrangement with Edward.

Alexander's wife bought a house at 117 Eagle in Dunkirk, probably with assistance from her father. Alexander was listed as living elsewhere in later censuses. Daughter Henrietta was a seamstress, boarding with the T. W. Glisan family in Fredonia. In 1864, sons Henry and Charles had enlisted at Dunkirk in the 65th National Guard Regiment. Henry was involved in

two battles at Hatcher's Run, but died at Slough Hospital in Alexandria in May 1865. Charles was mustered out in 1865, and four years later moved with his brother Eddy to the southern states, eventually operating a store and mill in Missouri.

In 1872, Willard W. Brigham, from whom Elizabeth was buying her home, sued and received a judgment against her for payments. Her other children were still living with her at that time. Alexander became incapacitated and was taken to the county "poor house" in Dewittville, where he was listed as "destitute" and soon died. He was buried at Forest Hill Cemetery in Fredonia, in the plot where his brother Robert was buried many years later.

### Robert Wolfers (1816 - 1897) and Pamela Hewes

Born in Germany, Robert must have been apprenticed as a carpenter. Considering his later building career in Fredonia, he obviously made himself known first by working as an architect and/or carpenter at various local projects. Robert was probably the "alien" listed in the 1845 state census in the household of Alexander Wolfers, but that arrangement would not have lasted too long.

In December 1845, Robert bought a 1/4 acre lot at today's 100 Eagle Street, where he would soon build the impressive Greek Revival mansion there. He may also have built the several small, Greek Revival homes that exist both north and south of the large house. Interestingly, Wolfers bought the lot from Fredonia's preeminent architect John Jones, who had emigrated from Bala, Wales.

After building his Eagle Street mansion in 1848, Robert married Pamela Hewes on 5 March 1849. She was the younger sister of Alexander's wife Elizabeth. Robert's and Pamela's first child Theodore H. Wolfers was born on Eagle Street, and both Robert and his father-in-law Edward Hewes were still shown on Eagle Street on the 1854 county wall map. Edward and Robert were among only 44 subscribers to the Fredonia section of the map, indicating that that they were recognized businessmen by that time.

In 1856, Robert was given the job of overseeing the construction of H. J. Miner's bank, which stood until the late twentieth century at 31 West Main Street. Robert and the project garnered much publicity in the *Censor*, and Robert also placed his business card in another Fredonia newspaper of the period, *The Fredonia Advertiser*.

Notices referred to him as a "designer in Architectural Drafts." He had an office at his residence but after his infant son Ernest C. Wolfers died, the Eagle Street house was sold to Asa Ellis. Wolfers bought the Thomas Aldrich home at today's 178 Central Avenue. It had been the Phebe Thompson property, and it's possible that she was a relative of Robert's mother-in-law Eunice.

Whatever the motivation, the move was a significant one. Whereas Eagle Street was once the main road from Fredonia to Laona, Shumla, Sinclairville, Gerry, and Jamestown, today's Central Avenue, then called Dunkirk Street, had become the main thoroughfare from Fredonia to the Erie Railroad station. The former horse trail became a plank road with a horse-drawn omnibus route. Impressive houses began to appear along the way.

When the Civil War broke out, Robert's brothers-in-law Julius P. Hewes and Eddy A. Hewes enlisted in the 112th Regiment, New York State Volunteers. Julius was listed as a groom and as a private; Eddy died while serving as a bugler. The special Civil War assessment rolls of May 1866 listed Robert's father-in-law Edward as a retail dealer in liquor, paying a \$25 in war tax, and Robert as a builder and contractor, paying \$35.

Robert was doing well enough by this time that he moved his office from the room "below Miner's Bank" to "the old brick building ... on Main Street near the stone bridge." He bought the premises in 1865 with the proviso that the Parkers retain their residency there until 1 April 1867. Another sign of Robert's relative affluence is the attendance of his sons Arthur and Theodore at the Fredonia Academy. Arthur attended for three terms, beginning when he was 14; Theodore attended for two terms, beginning when he was 17.

By this time, important developments were taking place in Fredonia. The Academy, formed in 1825, was to be phased into a state Normal School, which the village had bonded itself to build. This was a new kind of educational institution, of which the state legislature had agreed to build only four. It was both a coup and a financial burden to have obtained the promise for such a school in Fredonia.

The building was designed by Wilcox & Porter of Buffalo. The construction contract was awarded to Robert Wolfers. In June 1867, Wolfers entered in partnership with A. Hull, who had built the Union Free School in Forestville. That same month, Wolfers & Hull advertised for subcontractors to supply stone, brick, pine, and hemlock lumber, and the cornerstone was soon laid with appropriate Masonic ceremonies.

During this period, Wolfers also began work on a new home for himself. In November, enjoying his newfound status in the community, he moved his family into a new brick home at 178 Central. His former home was sold and moved to 215 Central.

It was Wolfers who moved the brick house from the Normal School site on Temple Street to Curtis Place. He also undertook contracts from H. P. Pier on Brigham Road, for Miss C. Pier on Central Avenue, and for Scott Aldrich on Central Avenue. He also built the Baptist parsonage, and he provided renovation and additions for the Baptist Church, and for M. Tiffany, F. Colburn, Dr. Gilbert, George W. Lewis. Lewis McKinstry, Deacon Merrill, J. Parker, and Dr. A. Wheelock.

Another large contract was for construction of the "Center Block" at today's 10 through 14 West Main Street, including with new headquarters for the Masons. Robert's son Theodore joined his father at age 19, and the Wolfers & Hull partnership seems to have been dissolved. The 1870 census described Theodore as a carpenter and joiner.

Wolfers also took on a junior partner William S. Sly, creating the firm Wolfers & Sly. They rented the Forestville Machine Shop and continued that operation under Sly's direction. Sly was born in St. Lawrence County in 1847. His wife was from Laona. Theodore Wolfers married

Sly's sister Mary Jane in 1873. A fire had damaged Robert's new home on Central Avenue in Fredonia, but it was repaired in time for Theodore to settle there with his wife.

In 1877, the Wolfers built the George Blood block on Water Street. By this time, Sly was working at George White's planing mill on Water Street. During an economic downturn, the Wolfers home on Central Avenue was lost, eventually sold by a sheriff's sale to Fredonia businessman Milton Fenner.