

The Career of Lewis L. **Crocker**  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2000

Lewis L. **Crocker** was born in 1836. His father, Luther, had a large farm in Pomfret. In November 1857, Lewis married Nancy J. **Wilson**. The 1858 Assessment Roll shows him, for the first time, as an independent householder but, apparently, still living in his father's home. From 1859 on, he is farming on his own 35 acres. He continued farming at least through the time of the 1875 New York State Census, where he identifies that as his occupation.

However, by 1872 he had also begun a meat market in partnership with Henry **Burr**. Their location seems to have been a basement area of the building at the corner of Water Street and East Main Street. The entrance to the shop was towards the rear of the building, on Water Street.

In October 1872 the furniture store partnership of **Bartram** Bros. was dissolved and Amos **Bartram** joined the meat market to make it **Bartram, Crocker & Co.** **Bartram** did not remain too long, since the 1873 Directory refers to the firm again as **Crocker & Burr**. **Burr** then left and, in April 1873, Ephraim P. **Wilson** of Portland took his place in the firm of **Crocker & Wilson**.

In January 1877, the partners bought a vacant lot on the west side of Water Street from L. A. **Barmore** for \$600. Their announced plan was to put up a two-story wooden building for a meat market on their 15x70 foot lot. (The basement they were vacating was to be used by **Howard** Bros., who owned the corner building, for manufacturing eye salve, the former **Pettit-Barker** enterprise.)

The announcement of the **Crocker-Wilson** plans was in the *Fredonia Censor* of 10 January 1877. By the issue of the 31st, they had taken over George **Blood's** furniture store at 13 *Water Street* (the modern number), giving in exchange their recently purchased vacant lot plus \$1,000. **Blood's** old store building was only 18x40 feet, but sufficient for their needs. **Blood** was already planning his new building at 12 *Water Street*.

The **Crocker & Wilson** meat market continued at 13 *Water Street* until February 1881 when Lewis **Crocker** withdrew from the firm, which became E. P. **Wilson & Son**. At that point he began a harness and grape basket manufactory (the harness part soon disappeared). The office was in a small, three-story building on **Day & Prushaw's** Carriage Factory lot about at 20 *Center Street*. The carriage business fell on hard times and, in April 1888, was sold off. In 1889, Thomas and Samuel **Wellman**, who had bought out Vincent **Dunn & Son's** broom factory near Laona, moved it to the third story of 20 *Center Street*. By December, they had purchased Harry **Parker's** former marble shop at 114 *East Main Street* and moved the broom factory there, leaving the third floor of 20 *Center Street* free for Lewis **Crocker**, who wanted to expand his basket factory operation.

An October 1890 item in the *Observer* had commented on the fact that **Crocker** was then employing four men and the factory was very busy, all of which suggests the grape basket operation was doing quite well. After the carriage works had failed, the D & F Street Railway Co. bought the property and began laying the foundation for a new car barn about at 12-18 *Center Street*.

By the mid 1890s **Crocker** moved the basket factory to a building about at 35 *Church Street*. The company seems to have lasted through 1900, although not on *Church Street*. It may have been moved to a building on *East Main Street*, part of the **Felt** Factory lot where the **Howard** Watch Co. had been. The *Fredonia Censor* of 28 March 1900 reported that a small storage barn of the basket factory was destroyed when the **Felt** Factory burned.

Since the last Directory to identify Lewis **Crocker** as a basket manufacturer was that of 1900, it may well have been the fire loss that caused him, finally, to retire. He died some four years later.