

The Fredonia Censor
(1821-1964)
An Informal History

Douglas H.Shepard

The Darwin R.Barker Historical Museum
(Revised)
October 2009

The story of Fredonia's long-lived newspaper begins with Henry C.Frisbee. He was born on 27 April 1801 in Essex County NY, either in Jay or in Elizabethtown, 18 miles southeast of Jay. His parents were Simeon Frisbee, a native of Litchfield CT and Lucy Reynolds Frisbee, daughter of of Israel and Deborah Reynolds.

Henry must have had a good early education, if his later writing is any evidence. Also, in a retrospective piece in the *Censor* of 9 February 1870, he noted that he was "a bookworm as soon as I had learned to read, I was often chided for being found with a book when it was supposed I was at work, and before I had entered my teens I had read up the town library where I lived, which consisted, however, of little else than Rollin's Ancient History, Clarke's Modern Europe, Josephus, Goldsmith's Histories of Greece and Rome, and Cook's and Maver's Voyages, and then I took to reading all the newspapers I could get hold of, which grew into a passion that has never left me."

When he was 13 (1814) he apprenticed to his brother-in-law, Luther Marsh (married to Henry's sister Lawry), who had brought to Elizabethtown from Burlington VT a printing press reputed to have belonged to the famous Colonial printer Isaiah Thomas that, it was said, Ben Franklin had worked on. Henry learned to set type and all the other skills a printer of the day had to know. In addition to job printing, he worked on the weekly newspaper, the *Reveille*.

In 1816 the weather was so bad that many families left the East "to find a more genial climate and fruitful soil." Simeon, his wife and the unmarried children were among those who left, traveling to Fredonia, probably in the Summer of 1817. Henry and his father worked as teamsters drawing loads from Fredonia to Dunkirk Harbor. However, Simeon Frisbee died on 11 December 1817 (he was 47 years old) and was buried in Pioneer Cemetery. Bereft of their major breadwinner, Mrs.Frisbee determined to return to Elizabethtown with the two younger children while Henry decided he would stay on and try to make his way in Fredonia. (He was then 16.)

It cannot be a coincidence that there was talk in the village about starting a newspaper just at the time when Henry was deciding to stay on. At some point in 1816, a James Percival visited the village and convinced some 25 to 30 local worthies to lend him enough money to buy the equipment for a print shop and start up a newspaper. As soon as this was accomplished, Percival bought equipment in the East, but on his way back stopped in Buffalo and agreed to transfer his interest in the business to William A.Carpenter and James Hull. Percival and Carpenter came on to Fredonia, set up shop and put out the first issue of the *Chautauque Gazette* in January 1817. After the first few issues were out, James Hull arrived, Percival sold the business to Carpenter and Hull, after which Carpenter soon sold out, leaving Hull as the sole proprietor of the *Gazette* for the rest of its existence.

Henry Frisbee, as he said, "readily found employment at very small wages in the Chautauqua *Gazette* office, then in its first year." The agreement was that Henry would work for Hull for three years at a fixed amount. At the end of two years (1819), still feeling deficient in his grasp of English grammar, Henry arranged with Hull to attend school for six months (working in the shop after school to pay for his board) when he would return and complete the last six months of his time.

Unfortunately, when Henry tried to return to full-time work, Hull's substitute apprentice had proved good enough that Hull (Henry was sure Mrs.Hull was behind it) let Henry go instead. He was forced, then, to find pick-up jobs of various kinds, while he boarded with Elder Handy on East Main St., one of which was

hay and harvesting for Zattu Cushing. He must have found much more work than has been recorded since he was able to survive for almost a year before he could begin his newspaper. We do not know what kind of work he did. However, we do know he could not get the printers ink out of his veins, and he kept dreaming of having his own newspaper. He began corresponding with some political leaders in the East, including Richard Riker, a New York District Attorney and City Recorder, a political power. At the time there was a split in New York between the Clintonians supporting DeWitt Clinton for Governor and the Bucktails, a Tammany group supporting Tompkins.

In those days it was accepted that a newspaper would function as the voice of a political party or a faction. What Frisbee suggested to Riker and others was that he be given some financial help in setting up a local newspaper that would support the Bucktails in opposition to Hull's *Gazette*. An agreement was reached and, learning that a printing establishment seized for debt was available in Buffalo, he leased it for three years with the financial backing of John C. Camp of Buffalo. The agreement is dated 30 March 1821. (Henry Frisbee was then 19 years old.)

"I hired a span of horses and a wagon, and, braving the then horrible 'four mile woods' beyond Cattaraugus Creek, reached Buffalo [and] made a bargain with Smith H. Salisbury the owner of the apology for printing materials aforesaid. . . . The materials were loaded up, and on Town Meeting day in March 1821 [22 March], I came trotting into Fredonia with them, feeling as important undoubtedly as Vanderbilt in a palace car. . . ."

In an 1873 reminiscence, Orrin N. Sage described that arrival. "I remember seeing a tall, rather awkward young man enter Fredonia, driving a two-horse team with a ponderous load of boxes, etc., who attracted many eyes as he slowly moved along, perched high upon his load. that was H.C. Frisbee who sat thus elevated. . . ."

The village Frisbee was entering and in which he would soon launch his risky venture was still quite small. We are fortunate to have a piece written by Levi Risley in January 1880 in which he set down his recollections of what Fredonia was like in 1821.

It is not always clear from Risley's description whether a family occupied rooms in the same building as their business -- many did -- but even by a generous count there were at most some 80 to 85 families in Fredonia in 1821, primarily strung out along Main Street. No doubt having made his rental arrangements ahead of time, Frisbee directed his plodding team to his new home, a small wooden building on the site where 34 W. Main is today. There he set up his old-fashioned press (Frederick Follett, in his *History of the Press in Western New York*, 1847, quotes from an unnamed source that the press was "manufactured by a blacksmith and carpenter in one of the new towns in Ohio.")

With his press, typecases and other equipment set up, Frisbee began his newspaper with, he tells us, a grand total of 50 subscribers and, for the first three weeks, not one paid ad. To save money, he bought "a second hand coverlid and straw bed and lodged before the office fire, tucking them away in a little closet in the day time."

In addition to securing subscribers and soliciting advertisements, the young editor/publisher had also to institute exchanges with as many other newspapers as possible, set the type for items copied from those newspapers and any ads as well as public announcements and legal notices, travel around to gather local news, write that copy and set it in type, proof it all, and print and distribute the final product.

Quoting from the same unnamed source, Follett says that in the first year, Frisbee's "principal assistant in type setting . . . was a lad some nine years of age." If so, he must have assisted by fetching and carrying. No nine year old could have been expected to do the actual typesetting. The process called for carefully choosing the appropriate fonts; picking out each letter, sign, mark of punctuation and space; setting each into a metal forme (backwards), and justifying -- that is, inserting enough spaces to keep the margins even without allowing great gaps between words or odd hyphenating at the end of a line. The type was then wedged in tight, the forme moved from the composing stone to the bed of the press, ready for inking.

Follett also says that "on publication days he called in his neighbor, a painter in a chair shop, [H.H. Seaver, of Rochester,] who assisted him at the Press, in the capacity of ball-man." (The chair shop, about at 20 W. Main, was Daniel Buxton's, according to Levi Risley's account.) The press Frisbee used would have had a fairly small platen to avoid warping under pressure. With the forme laid on the bed of the press, the ball man took the wooden handles of one or two leather balls stuffed with rags, rolled them on an inky metal plate, and rubbed the ink onto the type in the forme. Then a large sheet of paper was lowered onto the inked type,

Frisbee would crank the bed along to set the forme part way under the platen, and pull the long arm that moved the platen down to press the paper against the inked type. Releasing the arm let it bounce back by its own torque, raising the platen. He then cranked the forme the rest of the way to print the other half of the sheet. Then the bed would be cranked back out, the sheet of paper hung on a line to dry, and the process repeated.

When enough copies were done, a new forme would be set on the press and the other side of the paper printed -- perfected, it was called. After that, it only needed folding, bundling and delivering before Frisbee had to start in all over again.

Because of the limited size of the platen, the newspaper was printed -- like the *Chautauque Gazette* and so many other small town weeklies of the time -- on an 18"x21" sheet that was folded to make a small four-page issue. Frisbee's newspaper -- at first called the *New-York Censor* "so thick headed dutchmen in Pennsylvania would know it was a New York paper" he jokingly explained in later years -- was primarily made up of snippets culled from other newspapers. As business improved, the front page gradually filled with advertisements, a standard practice of the time. The back page also had advertisements as well as legal announcements and material copied from other sources. That allowed Frisbee to set one side of the sheet (pages 1 and 4) ahead of time, with more current matter occupying the inside (pages 2 and 3).

One factor in Frisbee's gradual success was that Hull's *Gazette* ceased publication at some time in 1822. (Hull began again with the *Chautauque Advertiser* in August 1824.) No doubt the *Censor* picked up at least some of the *Gazette*'s subscribers and advertisers. In June 1823, perhaps feeling emboldened by the *Gazette*'s disappearance, Frisbee moved to 14 West Main St., "the small white building two doors east of Todd and Douglass' store and nearly opposite Abell's Hotel [1 Park Place]." It was around this time that he was able to buy a better press and sets of type. And he was able to hire Sydney L. Rood in 1824 to help him with the printing business. Rood worked for Frisbee until 1826.

The year 1824 proved even more significant. Frisbee renamed the paper *The Fredonia Censor* with the issue of 8 June 1824, and on 25 November 1824 he married Sarah Eliza Pells. (She may have been a sister of Jacob B. Pells who was living near Dunkirk at the time and had a lime kiln business. His property burned down early in 1829 and he moved west. His daughter and granddaughter visited here from Minnesota in the Summer of 1837, perhaps to see the Frisbees.)

When Henry and Sarah were first married, they lived in a second-floor apartment at 51-53 West Main St. On 27 January 1825 he bought a lot about at 16 Eagle St. and had a house there by 1826. Their oldest son, Junius C., was born in October 1825. In 1827 Sterne Frisbee was born. The newspaper and the job-printing business seem to have prospered. In 1827 he treated himself to some additional sets of type. The amount of advertising increased significantly after the early years and seems to have been maintained at a high level into the 1830s.

In May 1828 Frisbee began using a whole new array of type on a new press which enabled him to print on larger sheets "without an increase of price for our paper," and in June he offered the old press and types for sale. He moved his office temporarily to "the Masonic building" about at today's 9-11 East Main St. in preparation for a new building on the old site. July 1830 saw him advertising for an apprentice, and in August he took a two-week trip to New York City from which he said he was happy to return. It is not clear what the purpose of the trip was, but within a week of his return he moved the office to "the new building" at his old stand, 14 West Main St. At the same time he added a bookstore to his newspaper and job-printing business, perhaps the reason for the August trip. Unhappily, in September 1830, 1-year old Henry S. Frisbee died.

By June 1831 Frisbee had decided on another layout change in the *Censor*. With the columns widened, smaller type used and advertisements compressed "we expect to give our subscribers about a third more reading matter." In addition "we have now room for all advertisements that come," a clear indication of how well the newspaper was doing. In 1832 Lucy Frisbee arrived to enlarge the family. In August 1833, Henry Frisbee's brother Myron arrived and opened a boot and shoe store over the print shop/bookstore. Frisbee also took on Ebenezer Winchester as an apprentice. (As part of Winchester's wedding announcement in June 1837, Frisbee added "formerly an apprentice in our office, and we deem it no slight praise to say, an excellent apprentice he was too.")

In 1834 the *Censor* was again redone to increase its size. It was at this time that Beman Brockway worked at the office for Frisbee and then went on to found the Mayville *Sentinel* in 1835. It was in April of that year that the print shop was destroyed by fire while Frisbee was away, although Mrs. Frisbee was able to save

the press and typecases. The next issue to the *Censor* appeared right on time although the bound volumes of the first years' issues were tragically lost.

Following the fire, the operation was temporarily set up in the Masonic Building. By the 6 May issue, Frisbee had returned, pointing out that "As we are obliged to build again immediately, we shall not be able to give that attention to our paper that we could wish."

It took almost two months, but on 1 July 1835 the *Censor* was able to proclaim "Our patrons and friends can now find us in a *new* building on the *old* spot, where we shall be happy to wait upon them for anything in our line." However, less than three years later, Henry Frisbee had made a big decision. Waiting until the 17th volume of the *Censor* was complete, he announced on 14 March 1838 that he was "retiring," turning the *Censor* over to that excellent apprentice, Ebenezer Winchester.

Frisbee was then only 37 and he was able to continue his bookshop and involve himself in village affairs until his death in November 1873. In February 1883, Orson Stiles wrote to the *Censor* from Kansas reminiscing about the paper itself. He described Henry C. Frisbee as "A man of clear conceptions, of positive convictions, and, as O.W. Johnson would express it, of 'severe integrity' . . . 'he was a good man'."

The new owner of the *Censor*, Ebenezer Winchester was born in Ellery NY in March 1814. According to Young's *History*, he came to Ellery NY in 1826 with his brothers who included Elhanan, Marcus, Jonadab, Jotham, Francis, Heman, Harford, "and others." Their father arrived later than the sons. He "was married twice, and, it is said, had 23 children."

Ebenezer himself described his early working years. He started as an apprentice typesetting for Adolphus Fletcher at the Jamestown *Journal* in May 1828, where his brother Jonas had been similarly working since late 1826 or early 1827. (Jonas, then 18, left in the Fall of 1828 to go to a rival paper, the *Chautauqua Republican*, owned by Morgan Bates.) Ebenezer continued at the *Journal* until April 1829 when he began a four-year stint with Frisbee at the *Censor*, three years apprenticeship and one as a journeyman. Jonas, who tried making his way in New York City as a printer, returned home in the Fall of 1830 and joined his brother as a journeyman printer for Henry Frisbee. In September 1831, Jonas wrote to his closest friend, still in New York City, Francis Story, that Frisbee was considering selling the paper to concentrate entirely on his bookselling. Frisbee was asking for \$1,000 payable over three years. According to Jonas, the business generated about \$1,200 per year with a subscription list of 400.

In that same letter, Jonas described some of the equipment at the *Censor* office which included a Ramage press. Despite Jonas's cajoling, he and Story did not buy the paper. Instead, in the Spring of 1832, he left one once again for New York City.

Ebenezer finished out his time as a journeyman printer for Frisbee then left his family home in Ellery in April 1833 bound for New York City and his brother Jonas. To explain some of what followed, it is necessary to explain the advent of another participant in those times, Horace Greeley.

Horace Greeley was born in Amherst NH on 3 February 1811. When he was ten, his father, Saccheus Greeley, became bankrupt and fled with his family to West Haven VT to escape his debts. In 1826 he moved on, to Wayne, in Erie County PA near Clymer NY, leaving Horace as an apprentice in a Poultney VT print shop. (Horace's cousin Matthew Greeley had had the flouring mill at 83 W. Main St. since 1816.) Horace did visit Wayne twice while still apprenticed. Frisbee mentioned in a piece in the *Censor* of 8 February 1870, "When Horace Greeley was serving his apprenticeship in Poultney, Vt., he made a visit to his parents . . . and called on me and stayed overnight." Ebenezer Winchester was working for Frisbee at the time and the two young men must have met. Greeley left Poultney in June 1830 and visited the family in Wayne, worked around, returned to Wayne on 1 January 1831 and stayed one month.

In August 1831 he made his way to New York City, found work as a journeyman printer and, in January 1833, took the plunge into publishing with another young printer as his partner, Francis Story. Sadly, Story died in a drowning accident on 9 July 1833. His place in the concern was promptly taken by Jonas Winchester who, two years later, married Story's sister Susan. Ebenezer married another sister, Eliza, on 15 June 1837. In his comments on Ebenezer Winchester, Frisbee had said that he had been away from Fredonia for five years, in New York and Mobile AL, so he may have tried Mobile only briefly before deciding to take Frisbee's new offer for the *Censor*.

One of the first things Ebenezer Winchester, the new owner, did was to change some of the fonts Frisbee had used, most prominently in the title line, and, in a somewhat tactless paragraph, the new owner/editor announced, in the 9 May 1838 issue, that the new style “will be found materially to improve its appearance.”

As his apprentice, he took on William D.C.Brown, known fondly as “Billie.” He was the son of the former Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, the man who had given the welcoming speech when Lafayette visited Fredonia in 1825. Billie, who was born in 1814, went to school in Fredonia while his father was Rector (1823-1826). He apparently returned on his own, perhaps when he reached his majority in 1835. He advertised his services teaching bookkeeping early in 1836. When William A.Hart, who had opened the first natural gas well in Fredonia, began his pleasure garden at the foot of today’s Hart St., he announced that he would “occasionally get up a display of Fire Works, having with him Mr.Brown, an experienced hand at the business.” (There is a reference in the 15 July 1908 *Censor* that “the late Mr.W.D.C.Brown used to make balloons to send up in Hart’s Garden on festival nights.”) The *Censor* of 28 June 1837 had reported that “the balloon . . . rose majestically into its destined element, and gave the most lively satisfaction.” And an ad in the 16 August 1837 *Censor* announced a huge fireworks display “got up expressly for the benefit of W.D.C.Brown, & Assistant artists to the garden.” The ad was signed by Brown and Aaron H.Hart, William Hart’s younger brother. Hart’s Garden was about to close and it was at that point that Billie found a new career as Ebenezer Winchester’s apprentice to the printing trade.

Winchester started off in a strong position. In a 9 February 1870 piece, Frisbee said “To Ebenezer Winchester I sold the *Censor*, and during his ownership the paper was very profitable, having a large legal advertising patronage in consequence of the closing up of the old Holland Land Company’s business.”

In November 1839, Winchester added Frances H.Ruggles, a local lawyer, as Associate Editor. This may have been in connection with plans to issue *The Settler* for six months from April 1840. It was a political advocacy paper supporting the election of William Henry Harrison for President. In July the entire office was moved to “the new rooms over Copp’s tin shop.” Despite the good financial condition Frisbee had described, Winchester apparently ran into some difficulties. In that 1870 account, Frisbee had added “Had he [Winchester] acted wisely he would have remained in it [the *Censor*] but he was rather unstable minded, and sold out in about two years. (It was actually a full three years, from March 1838 to April 1841.)

In addition to the paper’s condition, we have a brief glimpse at the personal side of Winchester’s life from the 1840 Census. Separated by only a few names are Jotham Winchester, one of Ebenezer’s older brothers, a James Story, and Ebenezer himself, all close neighbors. In the following year, tragedy struck. There was a fire at Ebenezer Winchester’s home and, somehow, two of Mrs.Winchester’s sisters, Mary D. Story, 22, and Sarah Ann D. Story, 34, both of whom had been living with the family, died from its effects.

That had been in February 1841. In March, Winchester sold out and moved with his family back to New York City. (An obituary notice in the *Censor* of 1 February 1843 notes that their two-year old daughter, Frances Elizabeth, had died in Brooklyn on 17 January.) He was later involved with Thomas Lake Harris, who was to establish a community in Portland NY in 1867. Harris became the minister of the Fourth Universalist Society in New York City in 1845 which may be where Winchester met him. Frisbee, in an uncharacteristically critical tone, described this part of Winchester’s career “[He] got half crazy on something called Fourierism, Spiritualism, or some other ism, and went off with a company afflicted in the same way into the mountainous regions of western Virginia, where he published a paper called the ‘Mountain Cove’ (something, I don’t remember what,) until they got starved out, and left for other parts. . . .I believe Mr.W. is still living [1870] in one of the towns on the Ohio river, doing something in the way of printing.”

What Frisbee was referring to was the *Mountain Cove Journal and Spiritual Harbinger* which was published by Thomas Lake Harris and James L.Scott with the “Publishing Agent” given as “E.Winchester.” Harris, influenced by spiritualism, had left the Universalists and formed the First Independent Christian Society in 1848. In 1851 he joined with James L.Scott’s Apostolic Circle at Auburn NY where they issued the periodical *Disclosures from the Interior and Superior Care for Mortals*. After Scott had established the Mountain Cove Community, trouble broke out and Harris was brought from New York City to help. It was late in 1852 that they issued the *Mountain Cove Journal* that Ebenezer Winchester printed for them. It contained a prospectus for the Grass Valley Gold Mining Co. that Jonas Winchester, by then in California, was trying to promote. The same ad in the *New York Times* of 22 December 1851 contained a statement of support for the project from their old friend Horace Greeley.

It may be that when Ebenezer Winchester sold out and moved to New York City, his apprentice Billie Brown may have accompanied him. It was in New York City that Billie married Harriet A. Plank on 3 July 1843. He does not seem to have returned to Fredonia until 18__ , and there is no indication that he worked for Winchester's successor at the *Censor*.

That successor was Robert Cunnington about whom very little is known. In his introductory editorial in the *Censor* of 28 April 1841, he referred to himself as "a young man," "a stranger to that community whose favor he seeks -- [and] that he comes before it unheralded and uninvited from a distant section of the country."

Cunnington's tenure was brief and unhappy. On 1 August 1841 died seven day old Frances, "only child of R. & T. F. Cunnington," on 12 January 1842 there was a brief notice that the *Censor* editor was ill "the last few days," and on 30 March 1842 came the announcement that "Robert Cunnington no longer has any control over or personal connexion with, the Fredonia *Censor*." Apparently one year from the day (10 March) the *Censor* passed from Winchester to Cunnington it now went to W. McKinstry & Co.

What exactly had gone wrong is not clear. The brief notice of 30 March added "It is hoped the Paper will hereafter be so conducted as to merit the *renewed approbation* of its friends, and the *restored confidence* of the Whig Party" strongly suggesting Cunnington had neglected to adhere to the party line. The *Censor* was begun with the understanding it would promote the party's causes and there must have been strong party pressure to see that that continued. What became of Cunnington after this date is unknown.

In their first introductory editorial the "Proprietors" declared both their loyalty and independence. "We shall strive to restore the beneficent policy and liberal principles of the Whig Party But while we glory in the name and principles of the Whig Party . . . we hope never to forget things in our devotion to a name." In other words, we support the party when it is right.

The new proprietor (editor/publisher) was the 26-year old Willard McKinstry. Born in Chicopee MA on 9 May 1815, he attended local schools until he was 16. In April 1832 he began a four-year stint at the Northampton *Courier* along with fellow apprentices Beman Brockway and Levi L. Pratt. From there he began his journeyman training in New York City, Hartford CT, and Springfield MA, where he worked three years for G. & C. Merriam, publishers of Webster's dictionary. From there he moved to Mayville NY to work for his cousin and former colleague Beman Brockway who by then, November 1839, owned the Mayville *Sentinel*. McKinstry stayed there one year then worked for the Erie PA *Observer* for six months, when the opportunity came to take over *The Fredonia Censor* from Robert Cunnington.

In fact, the *Censor* now belonged to "W. McKinstry & Co." The "Co." apparently was McKinstry's old friend Pratt. Levi L. Pratt, born on 18 March 1818 in Massachusetts, became an apprentice in 1832 at the *Courier* office where Beman Brockway was senior apprentice and Willard McKinstry also was an apprentice. Pratt was there five years then moved on to other ventures. After Brockway took over the *Sentinel* and McKinstry had joined him in 1839, Pratt, in 1841, came to Mayville and worked for Brockway for almost a year. That was when McKinstry was at the Erie *Observer*. A retrospective piece in the *Censor* of 22 April 1954 explains that "when the Winchesters [i.e. Cunnington] put the *Censor* up for sale, Mr. Brockway induced his old friend Mr. McKinstry, to buy it. Mr. Pratt, a pronounced Whig, became the editor. It was Willard McKinstry as business manager/editor/publisher and Levi L. Pratt as editor who took over from Cunnington.

On 10 April 1844, with a Presidential election looming (the *Censor* supported Henry Clay for President) the paper added two political editors to serve until the election was over. They were the lawyers Francis H. Ruggles, who had served briefly under E. Winchester, and Benjamin F. Greene. In addition, 12-year old Archibald Winthrop McKinstry was taken on as an apprentice.

On 24 April McKinstry took Junius C. Frisbee, Henry Frisbee's son, into co-partnership. Also added was Joseph Shepard as printer who worked for the *Censor* through 1850. Obviously the paper was growing and flourishing. The year 1847 saw more changes. On 2 March 1847 Henry Frisbee sold his stock in his Fredonia Bookstore to Junius, and retired from that business; Junius took over the bookstore, at the same time giving up his *Censor* co-partnership, leaving W. McKinstry in sole charge.

Two years later, Levi Pratt was appointed Fredonia Postmaster so he left the editorial chair. "The *entire* control of the editorial and business departments will hereafter be in charge of Mr. McKinstry, now as formerly Proprietor of the establishment, and who, at intervals during his ownership, has occupied the position of sole or assistant editor."

On 28 February 1850, a serious fire in the downtown area all but destroyed the *Censor* office, its two presses and much of the office supplies and equipment. McKinstry found a temporary office at ___ on the second floor over T.Gillis' Grocery. Next door was the office of the *Fredonia Express* who generously made their equipment available so the *Censor* of 5 March 1850 was enabled to appear without interruption. After several weeks, the office was moved to ___ W.Main St., on the second floor over D.W.Douglass & Co.'s store. This was temporary because McKinstry was already making plans to put up his own *Censor* building next door at 1 Center St.

The new building went up and the *Censor* moved in in October 1850.

Four months later, another change took place. The 4 March 1851 issue was the beginning of the *Censor*'s 31st year of existence and with it came an alteration in the management. "We commence the tenth year of our connection with the *Censor*" Willard McKinstry wrote, "in copartnership with a brother who has long been connected with the establishment. . . ." That was Archibald Winthrop McKinstry, Willard's youngest brother, who had joined the *Censor* as an apprentice in June 1844 when he was 16. In his new role, he became associate editor. The paper's ownership statement -- once W.McKinstry & Co., then simply W.McKinstry -- would now read "W.McKinstry & Brother."

One year later more changes were announced, this time in the production and makeup of the paper itself. The decision had been made to purchase a new printing press and, utilizing its increased capacity, enlarge the newspaper from seven to eight columns, and, at the same time, increase the length, in effect adding "*Seven Columns of additional matter.*"

The new press was a Northrup Cylinder Press, only recently developed. In fact, this one was only "the second of this size that has been completed." Joel G.Northrup, then of Syracuse NY, who was a shoemaker with a mechanical bent, had responded to an offer of a \$1,000 prize for an improved press. He won by designing one that turned out 1,000 copies per hour, double the 500 specified for the prize. That was in 1851.

The Cylinder Press used the same type settings in formes, but in place of the flat platen which pushed the paper down onto the inked type, the Cylinder Press rolled across the paper. Of course there were many other refinements that made the process much faster than the old presses.

(As a matter of historical accuracy, because the Northrup Cylinder Press had not arrived in time, the 2 March 1852 issue was actually run off at the *Buffalo Express* office. It was the 9 March 1852 issue of the *Censor* that demonstrated what the new press could do.) In addition to the increased speed of production and larger sheets of newsprint, the makeover also included a very elaborate masthead title line with a central cartouche; a large oval containing a number of symbolic elements. Prominent at the center, in its own frame, was a profile view of Benjamin Franklin, the "patron saint" of American printers. On either side were objects suggestive of the newspaper's scope and objectives: farming implements set against a rural scene representing the major occupation of its subscribers. However, the implements -- a plow and rake -- also included a manure fork, perhaps suggesting the delicatd termed "muckrake." Representing progress in communications were a railroad on the upper left and telegraph wires on the right. In the right background were shelves of books before which stood an old flat-bed printing press, a globe and a pile of large volumes surmounted by a scroll. In the extreme lower right was the artist's signature, "M.S.Pettit," that is Melanchthon S.Pettit, a local artist who specialized in woodcuts.

Noting that the *Censor* had been enlarged and improved, the *Fredonia Advertiser* of 5 March 1852 added that it would follow suit with its new volume year. So, on 2 July appeared the enlarged *Advertiser* with a makeover front page title line adorned by a woodcut view from the south of Barker Common ranging from the Johnson House on the left to Leverett Barker's house (the Barker Historical Museum) on the right. This woodcut too was by M.S.Pettit. In fact, there is an original pencil sketch from 1850 of a scene which was then reproduced along the bottom of the lithographed 1851 map of Fredonia. The *Advertiser*'s woodcut is a somewhat cruder reworking of that original sketch.

It is not clear to what extent these changes were a matter of friendly rivalry, or something more. When the *Fredonia Advertiser* was begun by A.E.Tyler and Joseph Shepard on 4 July 1851, with Levi L.Pratt, the *Censor*'s former editor, as the *Advertiser*'s editor -- Joseph Shepard had been a printer for *Censor* prior to this -- its avowed aim was to espouse the Whig's causes. The *Censor* had greeted its arrival somewhat warily. "If it shall truly stand upon the old platform of the Whig party. . .we cordially extend to it the hand of fellowship. . ." In other words, maybe, but we doubt it.

No newspaper exists in a vacuum. It affects and is affected by all the social, economic and political events of its time. Obviously neither Fredonia nor the surrounding area needed two papers espousing the exact same causes. The Whig party in New York -- as well as nationwide -- was being split by differences over many issues, but particularly slavery. The *Advertiser* supported compromises on admitting new states into the Union, the *Censor* opposed them. So the jockeying between the two Fredonia papers that included the makeovers, increased size, updated title lines and images, symbolized the political dueling going on in the newspapers' columns as well as in society at large. The *Advertiser*'s makeover of July 1852 was preceded by a change in ownership. The Tyler & Shepard copartnership was dissolved to be replaced by the firm of L.L.Pratt & Co. The "& Co.," was Joseph Shepard, that is, Pratt was majority owner/editor while Shepard was minority owner/printer. It seems to have been Pratt who pushed the more extreme agenda of one wing of the Whigs, for what he referred to as the "Conservative Whig press."

By 1857 the *Advertiser* was openly supporting "the principle advocated by the American Party" which was an outgrowth of the American Republican party of 1843, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner of 1849, and other similar movements which coalesced as the American party, also known as the Know-Nothings, vehemently anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant. In 1855 a resolution to maintain slavery split the American party. Their candidate for President was Millard Fillmore. Although many northerners went to the new Republican party and the Know-Nothings soon disappeared, the *Advertiser* continued its support and, on 26 June 1857, with the beginning of its 7th volume, redid its title line with a bold, new design.

Gone was the bucolic scene of a peaceful Barker Common. In its place was a fierce-looking American eagle perched on a shield decorated with the stars and stripes, in its beak, a banner. Even more interesting is the lettering of the paper's title. The uniquely elaborate letters have a black core defined by a thin white-within-black frame, and each upright stroke of each letter carries what appears to be an escutcheon with an open center which may represent the keyhole to a treasure-chest of facts, or to the secrets the Know-Nothings traditionally refused to divulge. The editor was no help in clarifying the interpretation. On 28 June 1857 he wrote "Those who have been accustomed to our old dingy-looking title, will surely observe and admire the beautiful substitute which was engraved expressly for us, and electrotyped for better service."

As the national news became more ominous with a war of separation looming, the two newspapers continued their editorial debates. In December 1860 South Carolina led the secession movement; in March 1861 Lincoln became President, and in April 1861 war began. After two years of terrible losses on both sides, on 8 April 1863, another dramatic management change was announced by the *Censor*. "Notice is hereby given that the firm of W.McKinstry & Bro. is this day dissolved by mutual consent The business of the office will continue to be conducted by A.W.McKinstry. Dated Fredonia, April 1, 1863. W.McKinstry. A.W.McKinstry."

The senior editor had a word or two to say. "My connection with the *Censor*, in the publication of which I have been engaged twenty-one years, is closed for the present . . . In yielding my present position as publisher of the *Censor*, I do it the more cheerfully, as my successor came here as an apprentice eighteen years ago, and with the exception of a few months absence, has remained in the office ever since. For thirteen years he has been a partner, during which time he has been mostly in charge of the editorials I may again, after two years, Providence permitting, return to my late position. Till then, farewell."

A.W.McKinstry added a note assuring readers that there would be no change in the paper's policies. What neither brother thought fit to elaborate on was Willard McKinstry's motivation in leaving. It may well have had to do with his other duties for he was now Fredonia's Post Master. For many years, it was understood that that position, as well as others, was the President's party to award. As one or another party came into power in Washington, the Spoils System went into action and, wherever possible, the party faithful were rewarded. Willard McKinstry was one of those, although somewhat belatedly, as L.L.Pratt had been some years earlier.

The appointment had been made by President Lincoln and took effect on 1 July 1862. The occasion gives a brief glimpse into the McKinstrys' personal lives. In the 2 July 1862 issue of the *Censor*, there was a note that the editor had received "many kind notices" about the appointment. This was followed by copy from six area newspapers. It is the last, that from the Jamestown *Journal*, that is of particular interest. "We are gratified to record the appointment of our friend McKinstry, senior [editor] of the *Censor* to the position of Post Master at Fredonia. He has worked long and hard for the public interest, and received small pay and few 'subsidies' or official favors therefor. He ought to have been it in the first place, but 'better late than never.' It is

time that our old friend McKinstry's path of life began to be paved with the sunshine of prosperity, if it ever is to come, and this, perhaps, is the commencement of a generous shower."

It is clear, even from that terribly mixed metaphor, that Coleman E. Bishop, owner/editor of the *Journal* understood the McKinstrys to be living in modest circumstances. It was understood that political appointments, such as to Post Master, could legitimately yield substantial profits to the officeholder, although that apparently did not eventuate in this case.

Profit or not, it is not clear that being Post Master was the deciding factor in McKinstry's temporary retirement from the newspaper. There is at least one other possibility. Irrelevant as it may seem, the first income tax in U.S. history had been established to help defray some of the expenses of the Civil War. Along with the legislation came a new bureaucracy and record-keeping. Those records preserve an account, month by month and year by year, of each individual's income -- those above a certain level as well as possessions of value. Combined with the usual assessment rolls, they give an interesting glimpse into McKinstry's financial status and activities.

In 1861, he and his brother-in-law, A.P. Durlin, had leased the Willow Dale Paper Mill, perhaps to guarantee a steady supply of newsprint. Built in 1824 by Orrin Ford and Thomas Bull as a woolen and cloth mill, it had passed through various hands and was sold, in 1857 to Aaron Kellogg who turned it into a paper mill. It was Kellogg who leased it to McKinstry and Durlin. If superintending the mill was McKinstry's reason for leaving the *Censor*, the planned two years was hardly enough since they did not give up their lease until early in 1865. (The income tax records tell us that the mill was used to turn out "Printing [i.e. Newsprint] & Manilla" paper, reaching amounts above 16,000 lbs. per month.) !!! FC 11-18-1863 complaints about paper prices!!!!

There is one other reason why McKinstry may have temporarily left the *Censor* and that had to do with the United States Christian Commission. Less well known than the more celebrated Sanitary Commission memorialized by Walt Whitman and Louisa May Alcott, the Christian Commission was begun in November 1861 by some YMCA members to provide Union soldiers with tracts and bibles. By 1863 they were also providing medicine and bandages as well as food and clothing where needed. Unlike the Sanitary Commission, they served without pay, six weeks at a time. Although Willard McKinstry did not put in his six week stint until the Fall of 1865, he was probably involved with the Commission's work at home, perhaps inspired in part by the death of his nephew Arthur at the battle at Williamsburg in May 1862.

On 5 April 1865, A.W. McKinstry, now 37 years old, announced he was turning the *Censor* back over to his older brother and, in November, moved to Faribault MN. He bought the Faribault *Republican* which he edited for many years.

Willard McKinstry moved back into his senior position until 1 July 1867 when his older son, Louis McKinstry, then --- years of age, with --- years of experience on the *Censor* already, bought a half interest from his father. It was "W. McKinstry & Co." from that date almost until the elder's death in 1899.

The cessation of hostilities between the North and South did not end those between the *Censor* and the *Advertiser*. In part, sniping at each other had always been understood to be part of the game. However, sometimes the exchanges could get nasty. Early in 1868, the *Advertiser* ran two articles suggesting the Post Office be moved to a more convenient location and describing McKinstry's job as a sinecure yielding much wealth. The *Censor* responded on 19 February 1868 with a long column that gave some real insight into the matter.

Apparently, when he became Post Master on 1 July 1862, McKinstry used the room in Miner's building, (at the corner of West Main and Center St. where C.J. Orton had been Post Master) for about a year, while he prepared space in the *Censor* building at 1 Center St. (right behind Miner's). The partition between two rooms was removed to make one long room so that the individual rental boxes all faced the street along one interior wall. In August 1863 the Post Office operation was moved there.

Countering the *Advertiser's* insinuations, McKinstry pointed out that during its first four years, the operation made a grand total of \$1816.87, or \$450 per year. Of that, the Post Master received \$227.01 per year. And that was "the only recognition of a quarter of a century of political labor." The *Censor* also scoffed at the *Advertiser's* suggestion that the Post Office move to Main Street just when, by coincidence, the *Advertiser* was itself moving from next door to the Post Office down onto Water St. However, the *Censor* was being a little ingenuous. For a long time, discussion had been going on about purchasing the corner lot at Water and East

Main streets and putting up a substantial building. Late in February 1868, it was announced that W. McKinstry & Son and L.S. Howard & Bros. had purchased the old Taylor & Jennings store building and lot at today's 1 East Main St. At the same time, Orson Stiles bought the lot next east of it. (The *Advertiser* tried to claim credit for the planned move, but the *Censor* pooh-pooed the idea. The *Advertiser* editor, they claimed, was "much like the aborigines, who, when there was an eclipse, set up a howl, to scare away the obscuration, and when it was over, claimed the credit, as the result of the noise they had made.")

What followed this more-or-less humorous exchange was a series of unexpected and very serious events. The old wooden stores on the two adjoining lots on East Main St. were both sold to L.B. Greene. He had them jacked up and ready to be moved -- by rollers and ox teams -- to his empty lots further east on Main St. when, on 29 April 1868, they were burned beyond use in a fire that began on Water St. and continued through to 15 East Main St.

It is not clear whether it had been planned that Stiles along with the McKinstrys and Howards would together put up a new building, or whether the fire brought about that arrangement. At any rate, the building that was to be the new home of the *Censor* was paid for by Stiles and the others. Designed by E.A. Curtis, it was called the Union Block, no doubt to memorialize the successful close of the Civil War, and was put up during the Summer and Fall of 1868 with a Grand Opening in March 1869. The color coding of the 1875 Sanborn Insurance chart shows the building to be of stone, which may have been to support the printing presses and prevent vibration, with a brick facing, the brickwork done by Stephen Johnson.

The substantial three-story structure was about 50 feet wide on Main St. running back about fifty-five feet. On the first floor the Howards had the Water St. corner for their Jewelry/Bookstore/Post Office. Stiles' "Union Banking Company and Chautauqua County Savings Bank" occupied the east half of the first floor. The *Censor*'s offices were on the second floor above Howards, E.A. Curtis, the architect, had an office over the front half of the bank, and at the rear was a barber shop. The entire third floor housed Ladd & Pringle's photography studio.

[FILL IN POST OFFICE BOOK STORE HISTORY]

The 31 March 1869 issue of the *Censor* was the first to be printed in the new location. Along with a new power press and the "steam engine" to work it, the McKinstrys had a hand press, a jobbing press, and a sink for washing ink off the formes, all lined up along the rear wall, which was a partition making their front room fifteen feet deep. Behind it were storage areas. The steam power press, made by A.B. Taylor's Son & Co. of Chicago, was quiet and self-inking, and the large drum cylinder was suited to "book and job work" as well as a ten-column wide newspaper, which they hoped soon to produce.

There were sets of type cases along the Water St. side of the front room with large windows to provide light for type-setting. In the middle of the floor and along the interior wall were "secretaries [work desks], standing galleys, imposing stones, and the paper cutter." The editorial desk occupied the front wall giving a clear view of "Main, Water, Temple, Center and Day streets, both parks and all the churches, so that we can chronicle everything down to the dog fights hereafter, up to the hour of going to press."

In fact it was not until August 1870 that the *Censor* actually expanded, to a nine-column width. A humorous item in the issue of 20 April 1870, pretended to advertise for a printer with special skills. What was wanted was one who could set the type for those advertising in the paper such that every one of them would be "at the top of a column, on the inside, and next to reading matter." Apparently there had been some complaints to which the proprietors had a solution. "Buy a full column, gentlemen, and you will be sure of both top and bottom." This was probably the work of Louis McKinstry since "the senior editor" was on a trip just then through the south where, in Huntsville, Alabama, he visited "James M. Moss, brother of our editorial associate, A.S. Moss, Esq." The McKinstry party also visited Orrin Morrison and his family formerly of Forestville.

Late in March 1871, J/L/Taylor, Proprietor of the Taylor House (at today's 1 Park Place) was appointed Post Master replacing Willard McKinstry who had served since 1862. Continuing its unpleasant sniping, the *Advertiser* suggested that McKinstry had made his way into office despite there being soldiers who would have wanted the position (Not true, according to the *Censor*, nor in 1867 either.) In fact, Andrew Johnson (President in 1867) would never have countenanced a Union soldier, although McKinstry did just that, hiring a soldier to run the Post Office during his (McKinstry's) tenure. In a further comment in the *Censor* of 12 April 1871, the editor explained that the soldier he had hired "served faithfully during the whole war, and was twice wounded. He has also had some two years' experience in the management of the office as an assistant."

The soldier McKinstry was referring to was George Tate. Born in 1840, he had come to Fredonia in 1856. The 1860 Census records him in the Albert and Melinda Grant household (at today's 90 Central Ave., across from the McKinstry home), working as a "Servant" at the same time that he "Attended School." The school was the Fredonia Academy where George Tate began attending in 1859 when he was 19. When the Civil War broke out, he and a classmate, William Staats, walked to Dunkirk and enlisted on 28 March 1861. George was mustered out on 30 September 1865. On 4 December he returned to the Fredonia Academy, completing his studies on 22 June 1866. He married Eliza M. Brown (another Academy classmate) in October 1866, clerked in a grocery store, and then was hired by McKinstry as his clerk in 1868.

After George and Eliza were married, his young brother Jesse lived with them and worked at the *Censor* as a printer, and another brother, Hiram, also worked there for a considerable time.

The next battle in these Post Office wars had Taylor convincing his "champion," ___ Benton, publisher/editor of the *Advertiser*, to search the files of the *Censor's* back issues -- under McKinstry's sardonically watchful eye -- to determine whether, when the "Letter Remaining" lists appeared in the *Censor*, how many times the signature "M.H. Taylor, P.M." was omitted compared to the lists earlier submitted by "W. McKinstry, P.M."

In those years before home delivery (which only began in Fredonia in 1899) patrons either rented boxes, which they checked regularly, or stopped in periodically on the chance a letter might be waiting. One device that began very early was to run lists of "Letters Remaining at the Post Office" in the weekly newspaper. Those are the lists in question.

Years later, on Willard McKinstry's death, the 1 February 1899 *Censor's* editorial began by saying it was "the first in fifty-seven years not to be fondly perused and looked over by its senior editor." This was something of a pious exaggeration since, the editorial goes on, "up to about five years ago there was never an issue that did not contain some contribution from his pen, for when he was away from home he always sent a letter or some note of his travels." Indeed he travelled quite a bit. "Immediately after the civil war when the feeling in the south was so intensely bitter, he began to go south every winter."
{INSERT TRAVEL REFERENCES}

Although Willard McKinstry was very much involved with his newspaper up until his death, it is clear that others, especially his older son, Louis, began to play a larger role in the paper's day-to-day operation. Willard McKinstry died on 26 January 1899 at the age of 83. He had presided over the *Censor* for some 57 years, three times as long as its founder, Henry C. Frisbee's, tenure, and far longer than any publisher would in its future.

Louis McKinstry continued running the newspaper, as he had been doing, until his own health began to fail. For a time after his father's death he had John E. Sanford as his assistant editor. Sanford, who was born in Forestville in May 1876, had worked in the office of the *Forestville Free Press*, then on *The Leader* when he was a student at the Fredonia Normal School, and at the *Censor*. In April 1898 he became editor of the newly established *St. Charles [Michigan] Review* for a brief time, then returned to the *Censor*. However, when Louis McKinstry was to resume his position as private secretary to Assembly Speaker Nixon early in 1901, he apparently decided he would need more help than in the past and John Sanford was named "Editor," at least for January through April. Thereafter, with McKinstry back in Fredonia, Sanford became "Assistant Editor." That arrangement lasted until November 1904, when Sanford moved on to become editor of the *Detroit Morning Tribune*.

Once again McKinstry reached into his office staff for help. For the 11 January 1905 issue of the *Censor*, the editing was done by the 21-year old Kenneth W. Hall. His work passed muster and on 18 January he was officially named "Assistant Editor" to Louis McKinstry.

Hall, the son of Richard and Anna (DeWitt) Hall, was born in April 1883. After his parents' marriage, the father's name disappears from the records. One local directory listed Mrs. Hall as his widow, but there is no notice of his death. Young Kenneth and his mother lived with his grandmother, Harriet A. DeWitt, widow of Clarence, at 32 Center St. Kenneth attended the local schools until he was 17 when he began working as a printer at the *Censor*. After becoming assistant editor in January 1905, he also became the Fredonia correspondent for various newspapers in the region and, by the end of 1905, he was offered a position with the *Erie Daily Herald*, which he took as of 22 January 1906. On 28 January, he married Sarah Carlyon of Dunkirk and the young couple settled in Erie.

Once again Louis McKinstry was publisher/editor, at least until July 1907 when he and his family left for an extended trip to Great Britain, Ireland and France, leaving Willam D. Putnam in charge as editor. Bill Putnam was a local boy who attended the local schools and the Fredonia Normal School. While there, studying in the English curriculum, he became "Local Editor" of P.R. Bartram's *The Fredonian*. This was a small weekly newspaper which lasted only for four issues, 17 October through 7 November 1903. After Putnam graduated from the Normal School in 1904 he had a stint on the *Grape Belt* as their Fredonia stringer. He was then brought to the parent newspaper, the Dunkirk *Observer* in 1905.

When Louis McKinstry decided to take his lengthy vacation, Putnam was hired as editor, serving from July through August 1907, when he returned to the *Observer*. Over time Louis McKinstry's health began to fail. When he addressed the Board of Supervisors in Mayville on 19 December 1918, he began by saying "I rose from a bed of severe illness to come to this meeting of the Board." Although he made it to the meeting, his health was enough of a problem that he finally gave up the *Censor*, selling it to Frederick C. Bickers as of 1 January 1919.

The sale of the *Censor* in 1919 represented the end of the McKinstry family's involvement with the paper after a span of 77 years. The McKinstrys -- father, brother and two sons -- had recorded, commented on, and influenced an astonishing series of events. During their tenure, the United States experienced war with Mexico, the Civil War, the Spanish American War and World War I. Along with these events came the Gold Rush, the railroads across the west, prosperity and bank failures, territories opened and new states added, and waves of immigration.

Between 1842 and 1919 Fredonia had added a Fire Department, Water Works, Forest Hill Cemetery, electric power, a public library, the Fredonia Normal School, a telephone company, a new Village Hall and Opera House, an inter-urban trolley system, banks, seed companies, food processors, and the watch company, and the McKinstrys recorded it all. In the rest of the life of the *Censor*, another 45 years, never again would there be that kind of continuity of ownership and editorial oversight.

That is not to say that the enterprise which changed hands in 1919 was without a flaw. Probably due to Louis McKinstry's continuing ill health, the *Censor* had begun to lose subscribers and the printing plant itself was becoming antiquated, all of which the new owner had to address.

The new owner, Frederick C. Bickers, was a Fredonia native, the son of George A. and Annie J. (O'Connor) Bickers, born on 11 December 1875. After attending Village schools and the Fredonia Normal School, he worked for a number of years as a salesman of school supplies for P.F. Colliers and Son. When he was put in charge of the circulation department of Collier's Weekly in Buffalo, he was able to once again live in Fredonia while he commuted. He married Ella Austin and they resided at 80 Liberty St. next door to his childhood home.

Along with the *Censor* itself, Bickers took over the antiquated print shop at 1 East Main St. He gradually increased his subscription list and the paper's size, which meant increased advertising revenue, so that by 1923 he was able to buy 40-42 Day St. (formerly 11 Lambert Ave.) and move the *Censor* office there. In 1926, after emergency surgery for appendicitis, he died on 11 September 1926. The expressions of regret that poured in and were printed in the *Censor* were unusual in the detailed praise heaped on him, and from them can be gained some insight into what he had meant to the newspaper and his community. Although a Roman Catholic in what had been a thoroughly Protestant community, and although he had changed the *Censor*'s editorial policy from the Whig/Republican stance it had maintained for 98 years to Democratic, he seems to have captured almost everyone's regard for his integrity, good humor, community involvement and professional abilities, as some excerpts will show.

"One may search far into memory. One may have traveled widely. One may have interviewed the great and the near great, but it is hard to think of, or in fact to conceive of a more picturesque personality." *Dunkirk Observer*

"Mr. Bickers ... purchased the Fredonia *Censor* some eight years ago and made it Democratic in politics, the only Democratic newspaper, by the way, in Chautauqua county. Notwithstanding the political policy, which had little support in Chautauqua county, Mr. Bickers made the newspaper so entertaining that it had a good circulation and support. His editorial comment on men and measures [manners?] measured up to a somewhat higher standard than is usually the case with a weekly village newspaper." *Jamestown Journal*

“Very few weekly newspapers have an editorial page so entertaining as that of Mr. Bickers in the *Censor*.” *Jamestown Morning Post*

“Yes it is true. An earthly spirit has been quenched. A dynamic fire of achievement is no more. Understanding is not vouchsafed to us, but realization becomes more poignant. We can laugh with him no more; there will be no more zestful arguments; no trivial quarrels; nor profound discussions in which he carried us to his own intellectual heights. Only love remains. That is immortal. Fred lives in the hearts of so many. Wallace A. Brennan in the *Censor*.

“The first astonishing thing he [Bickers] did was to place the *Censor* in the Democratic column, though it had for over one hundred years appeared weekly as staunch Republican, and Republican organization sheet at that. This move on the part of the new owner of the *Censor* cut his subscription list about 75 per cent, but that meant nothing to a man of the type of Fred C. Bickers. Opposition to his program simply brought out the best there was in him and by making the *Censor* one of the best, if not the best weekly newspapers published in Western New York, he not only regained all of his lost subscribers, but added materially to his subscription list until at the time of his death his newspaper enjoyed one of the largest circulations of any newspaper of its class in this section. With all due respect to the pretty and flourishing village of Fredonia, Fred Bickers was a sixteen-page man in an eight-page town and it is our belief that it will be a long period, if ever, before that community again enjoys a man of the calibre of the late editor of the *Censor*.” *Salamanca Inquirer*

“Coming to this business but seven years ago without the least experience in a print shop, Mr. Bickers lacked the conservative training of years at the case, the press, or in the news room. But he had something far better -- it has been proved. . . . Taking an almost worthless printing office and a paper without subscription list or advertising patronage, in just a few years this man built up a clientele and changed his weekly from a four-page paper to one regularly running sixteen pages, and with an equipment capable of expanding to much larger issues, as occasion often warranted.” *Randolph Register*

“Fitted by nature and education for almost any position in a much wider field Bickers, for the last eight years or so, has labored as the editor and publisher of the *Fredonia Censor*, a labor largely of love, although incidentally he has made a fine property of what was when he took hold of it a run-down country weekly.” *Silver Creek Times*

“Taking one of the oldest newspapers in the county, with high standards set by a family controlling the newspaper field in Fredonia over seventy-five years, Mr. Bickers proceeded to raise these standards, increase the output in every department and publish a better and larger paper.” *Forestville Free Press*

“Mr. Bickers was a credit to the Fourth Estate. Clever, a deep and sane thinker and of sincere convictions, he produced an editorial page which carried great influence in his community. His business ability was shown by the wonderful progress of the *Censor* since he assumed its ownership about seven years ago. (Williamsville) *Amherst Bee*

“He purchased the *Fredonia Censor*, the oldest newspaper in Chautauqua county and by his ever zealous effort and marked ability as a writer had made the *Censor* one of the foremost weekly journals in New York state.” *Chautauqua News*

“In the death of Mr. Bickers, Western New York loses its most capable and perhaps successful newspaper publisher; surely its master editorial writer.” *Depew Herald*

For seven months after his death, his estate retained control of the business. It was then sold to E. S. Pike and Arthur E. Towne. With that sale, for the first time in more than 105 years, the *Censor* was owned by someone not of the community. In 1927, Edward S. Pike of Warren, Ohio, was President of The Warren News Co., Inc., which published the *Cortland Home News*, the *Western Reserve Democrat*, and the *Warren Trumbull County Shopper*. Apparently he was trying to extend his regional scope by buying up a well-respected, western New York weekly. To manage the day-to-day operations of the *Censor*, Pike brought in Arthur E. Towne who had been advertising manager of the *Daily Ndews-Herald* of Conneaut, Ohio. As *Censor* advertising manager, Towne had with him Edward's son William Pike who had been working on the *Western Reserve Democrat*, and he soon added A. H. Halstead as associate editor.

In the advertising department was young Manley M. Sessions who replaced Arthur Towne as editor for a short while in 1929. Two months later, Sessions joined Towne in Ohio and Pike replaced him with Frank A. Gradler who was a newspaperman in Wisconsin. Gradler functioned as editor/manager into early 1932. In January of that year Manley Sessions returned to Fredonia, rented the large basement area in the Russo Building

(1 Park Place), installed a full print shop and -- with Frank Gradler now as his partner -- began issuing the *Fredonia Tribune*.

It may have been coincidence, but on 4 February 1932, the *Censor* announced its own great news. On 1 March, they would move to 11 Canadaway St., the former Curran's Garage, and finally "Own Our Own Home." (Mrs. Bickers still owned the Day St. building where the *Censor* had been renting.) In fact, the purchase and move was never made, because of what happened with the *Tribune*.

The eight-page weekly had its first issue on 21 January 1932. Six issues appeared, and the last one, on 25 February 1932, carried the screaming headline TRIBUNE BUYS CENSOR.

Fulfilling a long-held dream, Manley Sessions as the Tribune Publishing Co., with the youngest paper in Chautauqua County, had taken possession of the county's oldest. The two were merged and the new paper began appearing from the Russo Building office. The *Censor* printing equipment, moved there from its Day St. location, consisted of two Mergenthaler linotype machines, three job presses, and a Washington hand press, by 1932 a real antique. Having assisted in the purchase and changeover, Gradler relinquished his share in the new company and moved on -- with Sessions' thanks on 24 March 1932 -- leaving Manley M. Sessions as Editor/Publisher of *The Fredonia Censor / Chautauqua County's Oldest Newspaper / Combined With / The Fredonia Tribune / A Democratic Newspaper*.

One odd consequence of the merger was the appearance in the new *Censor* of a column which began with an apology for the errors in its previous appearance. That must have been quite puzzling to the regular *Censor* subscribers because the erroneous version had appeared only in the *Tribune*. Called "The Fredonia Museum, it was a column written by Miss Ellen E. Adams which began appearing in the *Tribune* on 21 January 1932. She had rented a storefront window at 25 W. Main St. where she displayed old-time items which were then explained in her weekly column. It ran only through 24 March 1932, although Sessions continued to run reminiscences and similar articles in the new *Censor*.

There were other features Session began in the combined *Censor/Tribune*. In addition to "a mammoth circulation campaign," there was a four-page colored supplement of comics, "something new to the weekly newspaper field." (Some of the comics were unnamed. The others included "Slim Jim" and _____? One of the unnamed seems to be "The Captain and the Kids," called "The Katzenjammer Kids" in later versions. Remembering that this was in 1932, well into the Great Depression, adds poignancy to the editor's comment that "the subscription campaign should provide ready cash and some worth while prizes to those who find regular employment few and far between." On 14 April 1932 was added the "Mid-Chautauqua and Lake Shore Section" aimed at "rural readers."

There were also personnel changes at the *Censor* under Sessions' leadership. In a detailed editorial in the 31 May 1935 issue, he described some of those changes which he instituted soon after taking control. Lucien Robert Oaks, a Colgate classmate, became editor. He later moved on to manage and edit *The Waverly [NY] Sun*. (Soon after leaving the *Censor*, on 13 April, 1935, he married Manley Sessions' sister, Esther. Details may be found in Esther Keyser's *Paddling My Own Canoe*, pp.53-58.) Oaks was replaced as editor by Sturges S. Cary who, on 7 November 1934, had married Sara T. Sanderson, a former social editor for the paper.

In the 1935 editorial, Sessions also commented on the economic difficulties he faced between 1932 and 1934 which caused him to spend most of his time on the business end, forcing him to leave the news end of things to men who "have been strangers in the community who have been forced to learn the ways and names of the people of Fredonia." Feeling that conditions were more on the upswing, he was going to institute some changes beginning in June 1935. "Donald R. Burgess, a local young man, born and brought up in Fredonia, will handle the news and editorial departments of the *Censor*." Burgess had worked on a number of dailies including the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* before he went to the *Dunkirk Evening Observer* where he had been editor for three years. (He wrote a series of articles on the WCA Home that, Sessions later said, "nearly started a village civil war.")

Along with Burgess as the new editor, Bessalee Fields of Cassadaga was added to the office staff freeing up Ruth E. Steger to become the social and personal news editor. Also, for the first time in the *Censor*'s history, a circulation department was created with Mrs. Maurice S. Guest as manager.

Sessions had the paper from 1932 to 1946. Herman Cutler sold advertising space, Art Goodrich (both of the *Observer*) worked for the *Censor*. Charlie Lupean was the linotype operator. Tommy Tarbox wrote a

column and Fred Coykendall began working for Fred Bickers around 1924. "He followed the Goss newspaper press" when the *Censor* moved to the Russo Building and continued when the paper moved again to the Card Building. Margaret Weimer and Al Chapman began with Sessions and stayed on with Gent. Stan McConnell was Sessions' bookkeeper.

CRAP GAME EDITION SESSIONS AND JIM ARMES

By May 1946, Manley Sessions was ready to hand over the *Censor* and move on to other things. He had served his community well through the worst of the Depression and all of World War II. His successor was a former newspaper man and veteran, Alfred C. Gent of Wellsville.

Gent had attended Wellsville High School and the University at Athens, Ohio. He became advertising manager of the *Wellsville Daily Reporter* before going into the Army in January 1941. He rose from Private to Captain in the five years he served, mustering out just two months before buying the *Censor*. In the first issue under his name, on 7 June 1946, Gent laid out his philosophy: "a newspaper isn't actually the possession of the person who holds title to its physical properties, but like the city, or town hall -- belongs to the people it serves [and] The life blood of a weekly newspaper is news about people you know."

In December 1953, Gent leased the Card Building at 50 W. Main St. The time between 3 December 1953 and 28 January 1954 was taken up with removing the Card Seed Co. equipment and doing extensive alterations to the building. Then, on 28 January, the big move took place. One of the *Censor's* two Linotypes was dismantled and moved as was the 12-ton press used for the newspaper. The issue of 4 February appeared on time after which it was time to move the second Linotype, "the Ludlow typesetting machine, composing room and stereotyping material." The move was completed by 15 February and, on 22 April 1954, the delayed open house took place. However, almost exactly one year later, the paper was sold once again. This time the purchaser was Carmon C. Greer of Gowanda. (Oddly enough, Gent joined Manley Sessions at the Sessions Insurance Agency.)

Greer, who was born in North Carolina in June 1912, studied Journalism at the University of North Carolina and went on to work with various newspapers in North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. In 1951 he bought the Gowanda *News*. He was also the publisher of the Eden *Village News*. His plan was to move the printing of the two to the *Censor* plant, leaving the editorial and news offices in Gowanda and Eden. (His wife, Eleanor Moore Greer, was editor of the Gowanda paper and continued there.) Following on his "Dollar Saver," an advertising supplement of the *News*, he planned to bring "The Lakeshore Dollar Saver" as a *Censor* supplement. (The *Censor* plant was still printing the *Daily Chautauquan* during the Summer season and *The Leader*, the student newspaper of the State University Teachers College at Fredonia.)

Despite all those grand plans, things did not work out for The Fredonia *Censor*, Inc. under Greer Publications, Inc. By mid-June 1955, the long-time editor of the *Censor*, Walter J. Baker, bought sufficient stock in the Greer corporation to name himself publisher as well as editor. Greer was to "assist Allan F. Chapman, advertising manager, in the solicitation of accounts," a significant demotion, and there was more trouble to follow.

At the end of December 1955 Greer Publications, Inc. went into temporary receivership upon the petition of three Fredonia creditors for reorganization: Alfred C. Gent, Harry F. Salhoff, and Leonard J. Taddio. Daniel P. Scannell, Dunkirk attorney, was named temporary receiver. Subsequently Greer announced a \$500,000 damage suit which was never instituted. Instead, an agreement was reached whereby, as of 30 January 1956, the *Censor* was sold to Fredonia Printers, Inc., a corporation formed by Walter J. Baker, Pres.; Taddio, Vice President; and Louis W. Miinte, Secretary/Treasurer. Baker became publisher and editor, Taddio supervised the printing plant, and Miinte headed up the job printing department.

One of the first changes Baker instituted was the return of some popular cartoons and the editorial page cartoon, all of which had been discontinued under Greer's ownership. Allan F. Chapman was advertising Manager and Margaret Weimer Society Editor. Then, in what was probably an ominous sign, Chapman resigned, after twelve years with the *Censor*, to become public relations director of a Baptist Home for Children in Oneonta NY.

Another ominous sign was the gradual lessening of pages. From Bickers' 16-page paper, the *Censor* gradually declined to 14 and 12 pages by 1955, to 10 in the early 1960s, to 8 in 1964. On 20 April 1964, what was to be the last issue of *The Fredonia Censor* appeared, a run of more than 143 years from the Presidency of James Monroe (then just into his second term) to that of Lyndon Johnson. Those national and international

matters were recorded in the *Censor* for all those years, but probably much more significant was the local news: births, death and marriages; civic improvements and setbacks; Village and Town politics; religious and patriotic celebrations; fires, floods and graduations. Everything that related to the life of the community. By recording it the *Censor* helped maintain that community's sense of itself -- maintain it and shape it. The *Censor*'s official valedictory comment seems to sum it all up. The *Censor* "has sought to serve as the voice of this village and of the Town of Pomfret." "The Censor stands proudly before its past record."