

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #5

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

By Jim Ford

The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

A NATIONAL COMPANY BEGINS IN BOUCKVILLE

When we travel to our local grocery store, it is easy to find a brand name which has maintained a highly-regarded market reputation for more than 140 years. I am referring to the Mott's name on products ranging from apple juice and apple sauce to vinegar and low sugar drinks for tots.

Many people have no idea that the company was founded by Samuel Rogers Mott in Bouckville, N.Y. The story of Mott's is one of the greatest success stories in our antiques show region.

Samuel Mott was born in 1826. He grew up in Saratoga County, north of Albany, near the community of Half Moon. When he was 16 years old he began learning the art of cider making from his grandfather and quickly became known as an expert orchard manager and maker of cider and vinegar in that region of the state. He married Ann Mary Coon and their marriage produced five children; John Coon, Mary Frances, Frederick Gates, Samuel Rogers, Jr. and Seward.

In 1867 he set out for Bouckville by way of the Erie and Chenango Canals to purchase a one-third interest in a vinegar factory.

He may have heard of this opportunity from other Mott relatives who were already living in Hamilton at the time. Mr. and Mrs. Mott were enrolled in the Madison Congregational Church that same year, as the church records show, and he then returned to Saratoga County. In 1868 he brought his wife and four of his children to Bouckville by using the same canal route. They purchased the former McClure's Tavern building for their home. It is located just to the east of the Depot Antiques building (former railroad depot) and looks much the same as when Mr. Mott owned it. He and his wife lived in the home for the remainder of their lives.

The vinegar factory that Mott bought a one-third interest in was located in the old cobblestone distillery building on the west side of the canal. Mr. Mott bought out the interests of his partners in 1869 and named the new firm the Mott Cider Company. His competition was now to be centered on the Peet Brothers, who also had an extensive vinegar factory on the west side of the canal, just south of today's Cider Street Café.

The oldest son in the family, John Coon Mott, had already set off for a career in New York City. After trying a couple of business ventures, he finally opened a cider mill in the vicinity of the present-day Jacob Javits Center, near Pier 76.

With the opening of the railroad through Bouckville in 1870, a better way was offered to transport vinegar to distant markets and also some sweet cider to local markets. Samuel Mott had sold a parcel of land just to the west of his home to the railroad for the depot site. Meanwhile, his son, John Coon Mott was thriving in the New York City area and in 1879 the two business firms were merged into the S.R. & J.C. Mott Cider Company with sales offices in New York City. Shipments were sent to cities along the U.S. coast and to Argentina, England and France.

Competition with the Peet Brothers grew over the years. Both companies expanded their facilities in 1882. The Peet Brothers built a large structure on the east side of the canal. The building exists today and is known as the Bouckville Mill. Samuel Rogers Mott and John Coon Mott built a new complex across the highway from the Mott home, next to the railroad tracks. (Today all of these buildings are gone, as well as the railroad tracks.)

In their place are the long tents and pavilion on the "Cider House Show Field" and the antique shops on both sides of this area, as well as the campground and parking areas behind the show field. Much of this area is now owned by Mr. Jim Dutcher.) Another building along the highway, near the new complex, was reconditioned to be used as a cooperage, that is, a barrel-making factory.

During the fall of 1882 the mill of S.R. & J.C. Mott in Bouckville was processing 14 carloads of apples per day brought on the railroad, which gave a yield of 600 barrels of juice per day. A barrel was to contain 25 gallons of liquid (100 quarts) by state law at this time.

In 1885 the Peet Brothers decided to sell their cider mill to Mr. Mott and concentrate on their cheese box mill and sawmill instead. With both of the mills along the canal in their possession plus the new mill across the street from the Mott home, and with John Coon Mott's mill in New York City, business increased dramatically and soon the firm was purchasing apples from a six-state area. Buyers were sent to areas in New York State and to surrounding states to assess the crop and to make advanced purchases for the fall. At this time, purchases were shipped from 50 railroad depots in New York State alone.

The 1887 apple season gives a good indication of how the firm had grown in scope at the Bouckville plant. "For eight weeks the mill was running day and night. 5,500 bushels of apples were ground daily, 300,000 bushels for the season. 40,000 barrels of cider were made from the efforts of the 100 men employed." A percentage of the product was sold as sweet cider and the remainder marketed later as vinegar and apple champagne. (40,000 barrels equals 1 million gallons of cider.)

Questions have been raised concerning shipping sweet cider on the railroad and getting it to market in a fresh state. The Motts built a large icehouse and filled it during the winter ice harvest. The ice was packed in sawdust so that it would not melt and then used to cool the cider for shipment during the warmer days of September – December.

As Samuel Rogers Mott removed himself to more of the business end of the Bouckville operation, his son, Frederick Mott became the manager of the plant.

As the new manager, his ideas led to greater efficiency in the form of new machinery in both the refining plant and the barrel factory.

In part two of the Mott's story, we will look at each of the family members and highlight events from their lives, as well as continue the history of the company and the various name changes for the company. Our story will end with the disastrous fire in 1931 and the closing of the plant.