

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

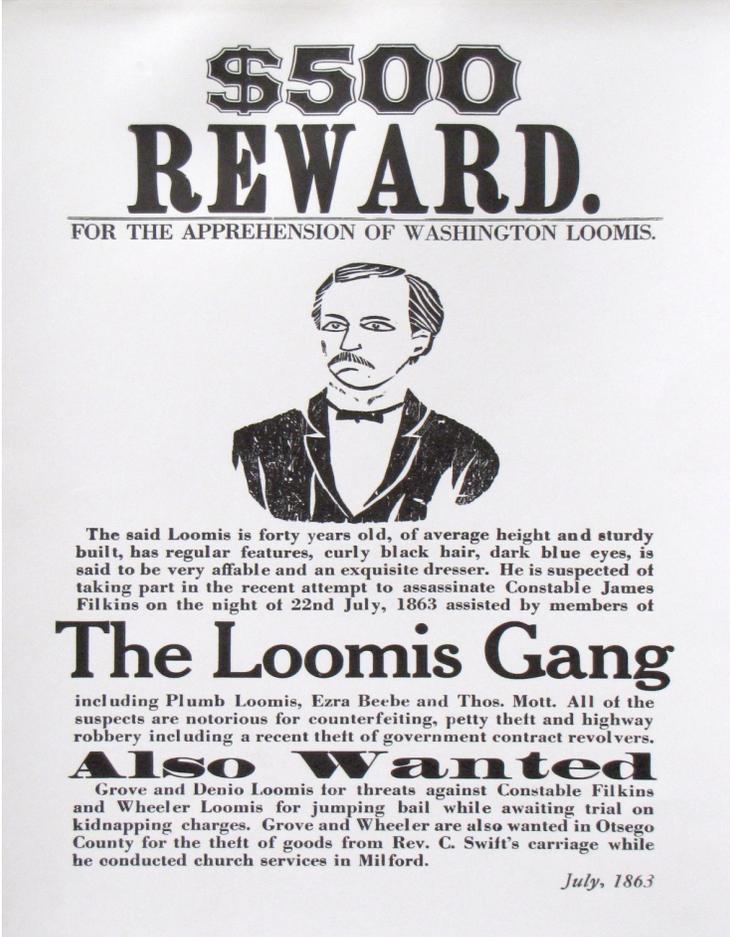
"TURNPIKE TALES" #32

(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 newsletter, 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.

THE LOOMIS GANG IN THE TOWN OF MADISON



**\$500
REWARD.**

FOR THE APPREHENSION OF WASHINGTON LOOMIS.



The said Loomis is forty years old, of average height and sturdy built, has regular features, curly black hair, dark blue eyes, is said to be very affable and an exquisite dresser. He is suspected of taking part in the recent attempt to assassinate Constable James Filkins on the night of 22nd July, 1863 assisted by members of

The Loomis Gang

including Plumb Loomis, Ezra Beebe and Thos. Mott. All of the suspects are notorious for counterfeiting, petty theft and highway robbery including a recent theft of government contract revolvers.

Also Wanted

Grove and Denio Loomis for threats against Constable Filkins and Wheeler Loomis for jumping bail while awaiting trial on kidnapping charges. Grove and Wheeler are also wanted in Otsego County for the theft of goods from Rev. C. Swift's carriage while he conducted church services in Milford.

July, 1863

THE LOOMIS GANG

Their Activities in the Town of Madison

If you have been a resident in Central New York for any length of time, you have undoubtedly heard of the Loomis Gang. They were a noted family of thieves whose exploits extended from the counties of Central New York to Pennsylvania, Vermont, and even across the border into Canada.

In this report we are not going to repeat the background history of the Loomis family and their various activities in the vast geographic area referenced above. These can be found in the books written about the gang. They would include: *Nine Mile Swamp* by Harriet McDoual Daniels, *The Loomis Gang* by George Walter, *Frontier Justice* by E. Fuller Torrey, *Family of Crime* by Isabel Bracy, and *Ride with the Loomis Gang* also by E. Fuller Torrey. Instead, we will document the interactions of the Loomis Gang in the Town of Madison.

LOCATION OF THE TOWN OF MADISON

The Town of Madison is located in the southeastern portion of Madison County. The town is bordered by the towns of Stockbridge, Eaton, Hamilton, and Brookfield in Madison County and the towns of Sangerfield and Augusta in Oneida County. The Town of Sangerfield was the home of the Loomis Gang. Communities located in the Town of Madison include the Village of Madison, Bouckville, Solsville, Madison Center, and Lyon's Mills. All of the listed communities, as well as outlying farms experienced the depredations of the Loomis Gang.

THE LOOMIS FARM

George Washington Loomis, Sr. purchased 15 acres of land near Sangerfield Center in 1802. By 1852 that 15 acres had grown to over 400. The farm straddled the line between Oneida County and Madison County in the Town of Sangerfield and the Town of Madison respectively. The farm home was on the Oneida County side.

Credit: *Frontier Justice* by E. Fuller Torrey, pgs. 11 and 13

THE LOOMIS CHILDREN

George Washington Loomis, Sr. (1779 to 1851) and Rhoda (Mallet) Loomis (1793 to 1887) had twelve children, ten of whom reached adulthood. Their first child was Harriet Amelia. She was born in 1815 and died in 1817. The last child born to the family was also named Harriet, born in 1838 and died in 1840.

The ten children who reached adulthood were:

Calista Adelia – 1817 to 1854

William Walter – 1819 to 1896

Maria Cornelia – 1821 to 1893

George Washington – 1823 to 1865

Grove Lawrence – 1825 to 1878

Lucia Ella – 1828 to 1858

Wheeler Theodore – 1831 to 1911

Mary Charlotte – 1832 to 1870

Amos Plumb – 1834 to 1903

Hiram Denio – 1836 to 1880

Credit: Information from ancestry.com

EDUCATION FOR THE LOOMIS CHILDREN

The Loomis children received their early education at the Tinker Hollow School in the Town of Madison. Records show this as School #4 of the Town of Madison and was located at the southern end of Tinker Hollow Road. This was at the intersection of Tinker Hollow Road and Bailey Road as shown on the D.G. Beers Atlas map of the Town of Madison in 1875. Wash Loomis is given as an example of having attended this school and then furthered his education by studying law with James B. Eldridge, of Hamilton, New York. This legal education would serve Wash well in the coming years.

Credit: Ride With The Loomis Gang by E. Fuller Torrey, p.3 and Frontier Justice by E. Fuller Torrey, p.15

TAUGHT TO STEAL

Rhoda Loomis had a great influence on the early years of her children. She had been a school teacher and wanted the best education possible for both the boys and the girls.

She also taught them certain ideas that she had been taught by her father.

“We sometimes traded little things like boys do, and learned quickly to deceive and cheat. Mother smiled approval when she learned of what we did and told us not to get caught or to allow anyone to get the better of us.

When we stole little things, Mother approved. As long as we were not caught, she said it was alright. If we got caught, we got licked. Mother was always quick to reward us for our cleverness and was unusually severe in punishing our mistakes.”

Credit: Frontier Justice by E Fuller Torrey, p.15

(It was interesting for me to see that Rhoda (Mallett) Loomis was from Stratford, Connecticut. I was raised on Stratford Street, just north of Solsville. The street was named by the Curtis and Lewis families who came from Stratford, Connecticut.)

THE LOOMIS FAMILY BECOMES THE LOOMIS GANG

We see by the birth dates of the Loomis children that by the 1840's they are reaching adulthood. What had begun as simple thefts of small items soon grew into a coordinated effort to form a gang that would steal horses and sheep, as well as wagons and harnesses and even clothing off the clothesline. Of course to do this, the Loomis family not only stole items themselves but also employed others to steal for them. One estimate states that there were as many as 100 people involved in the gang activities.

The stolen goods were marketed in other areas by using the highways and also the Chenango Canal. The route of the Chenango Canal took it through the Town of Madison. Stolen goods could be loaded at Bouckville or Solsville and delivered to Utica at one end of the canal or to Binghamton at the other end.

Credit: Research of the author

FORMATION OF THE ANTI-LARCENY SOCIETY

By the mid-1840's the thefts of the Loomis Gang and their associates was becoming a great concern for people throughout Central New York. In response to the illegal activities of the gang, citizens of the Town of Madison met to form an Anti-Larceny Society. The following tells of that meeting. -- In the minutes of the society it states: "Madison, June 7, 1845. We the undersigned inhabitants of Madison and vicinity feeling the necessity of taking some efficient measures to prevent, if possible, and trying to bring to justice the perpetrators of the several crimes so often committed in this vicinity such as Horse Stealing, Burglaries, and all similar depredations against the law and good order of society, we the undersigned inhabitants of the Town of Madison met agreeable at the home of George Goodings for the purpose of organizing ourselves into a Society and to devise some plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole community in one effort to bring to justice all such perpetrators."

The article goes on to say that: "Officers were elected and a preamble written, in addition to resolutions and by-laws. Riders were selected by the trustees, funds collected to defray expenses and we now have sufficient horsemen to pursue the unfortunate man or men who may wantonly disregard the ownership of property not belonging to them. We will also detect and bring to justice the burglar, incendiary, counterfeiter, and other trespassers."

Madison Observer – July 9, 1845

THEFTS IN MADISON

Under Wash's direction larceny in Central New York had become endemic. Nothing was too large or too small to be stolen, and the Loomis farm swallowed the contraband which flowed into it from all directions. According to one newspaper account detailing recent thefts in the Village of Madison and outlying township area attributed to the Loomis Gang in the mid-1850's:

"Horses, harnesses, leather boots, shoes, buffalo and wolf robes, cloth, clothing, etc. were taken. Not long ago ladies' underclothes were taken from the yard of Allen Curtis, the same night a small quantity was missed from the yard of John Dye. The next night an attempt was made to enter Mr. Dye's home. A few nights later an attempt was made to pick the lock of Curtis and Dye's carriage house. It failed. On Tuesday night of the fifth, two valuable robes and thirty chickens were taken from Henry Taylor and a piece of cotton cloth from D.Z. Brockett. On Sunday evening the tenth, a robe was stolen from Rev. C. Swift's carriage while he conducted services at the Durfee School House."

(The Durfee School was located near the corner of Quarterline Road and Robinson Hill Road. It was designated as School District #5 of the Town of Madison.)

The Loomis Gang by George W. Walter, pgs. 78-79 – quoted from the Madison Observer

BIG BILL ROCKWELL

The person entrusted to thefts in the western part of New York State was Bill Rockwell, known as "Big Bill." He was well over six feet tall, was from Moravia and was involved in selling patent medicines in Madison when he was confronted by Wash Loomis over the quality of his product.

Following a battle of words, Rockwell invited Wash to visit him at the Madison Hotel, where he was staying. The meeting turned out to be beneficial for both since Rockwell agreed to steal horses for Wash and the Loomis family would profit from the sales. (Rockwell became known as "the terror of the Finger Lakes" and also courted Cornelia Loomis.)

Frontier Justice by E. Fuller Torrey, pgs. 29-30

A GANG MEMBER FROM MADISON

The most notorious member of the Loomis Gang was Bill Alvord, from Madison. He was a tall powerful man and was extremely mean.

He had been arrested for the first time in 1838 and by the early 1850's had already served three sentences in prison, two of which were for counterfeiting. He was known as the "terror of Madison County.

Alvord was involved in grand larceny, burglary, and counterfeiting. Records show that he was convicted of burglary in 1840 and sent to Auburn prison. He was discharged in 1842. He was again convicted in 1849 and sent once again to Auburn Prison. The charge was grand larceny.

The United States Census of 1860 lists Alvord among the inmates of Auburn Prison. The charge this time is unknown. In between prison terms Alvord stayed at the Loomis farm and helped to carry out their thefts.

The fall of the Loomis Gang in 1866 did not change the habits of Alvord. In 1871 he was convicted in Oneida County on charges of assault and battery with intent to kill with an axe. He again went to Auburn Prison. He was discharged in 1873. On the 1875 New York State Census he is listed on the roles of Auburn Prison. We do not know the charge.

And finally, Alvord was convicted in 1877 of 3rd degree burglary in Oneida County and was sent back to Auburn Prison. He was discharged in 1880. He was 70 years old at the time.

Onondaga Standard – March 30, 1853 and items from fultonhistory.com

"PHINNY" WILLIAMS AND WASH LOOMIS

One of the most colorful individuals who have ever lived in the Town of Madison was Phineas "Phinny" Williams. He never held a full-time job, loved to fish, and is reported to have never taken a bath until the age of 91 when he was taken to the County Home in Eaton. He died on March 11, 1911 at 107 years old.

While Phinny was said to be of low intelligence, the following story shows that he could catch a Loomis family member in a lie!

In 1840 Isaac Curtis became the proprietor of the Madison House. He owned the hotel from 1840 to 1861. This story is c.1845. Phinny did chores for Mr. Curtis, such as stable work, and spent the remainder of his time fishing in Madison Lake or the Oriskany Creek.

While working at the Madison House for Isaac Curtis, Phinny had an experience with a member of the famous Loomis Gang. During one evening, Wash Loomis came into the hotel and asked to be put up for the night. Wash was known to be a "slippery character." Isaac Curtis assigned a room to Loomis, who immediately retired for the night.

Early the next morning Mr. Curtis was in conversation with another acquaintance, when Wash came downstairs in his stocking feet and appeared to be thoroughly angry. "You run a hell of a place," he said to Mr. Curtis.

"Why, what's wrong with my hotel, Wash?" Curtis asked.

"Can't a man stop here without having his clothing stolen?" Wash raised one leg and exhibited a bootless foot. "While I was asleep last night, someone entered my room and stole my boots."

"Nonsense," the hotel keeper said. "No one entered your room."

Before the argument could continue, the back door opened and Phinny Williams entered carrying a pair of boots under his arm. He walked straight up to Loomis and handed him the boots. "I was listenin' and heard what you said," Phinny remarked slowly, "and I say you lie! I was out in the barn sleeping in the hay last night when you sneaked in. You woke me up. When I see it was you, I kept still and watched. I see you take off your boots and hide 'em in the hay. You didn't think there was anybody around, but I see'd you."

Wash's face flushed angrily as he quickly drew on his boots. Then he took a step toward Phinny with his fists clenched as if he was going to strike Phinny. "You damned old," he began, and then stopped suddenly as he met Phinny's eyes. Phinny was a formidable foe! Wash choked back whatever he had been about to say and flinging a note down on the bar, quickly left the hotel.

So, Phinny Williams, although called a “simple” man, outwitted Wash Loomis.

Credit: An article written by George W. Walter

NELLIE SMITH – MISTRESS OF GROVE LOOMIS

Rhoda Loomis was very protective of her family and did not approve of her sons bringing prospective brides to their home. Grove Loomis tested his mother in 1863 when he brought Nellie Smith home to be his mistress.

Nellie was from a respected family in the Village of Madison. She said that she agreed to live with Grove “because he wanted me to and because he promised to marry me if I would go.” This was clearly a challenge to Rhoda. As she had always done, Rhoda was prepared to end this relationship.

Frontier Justice by E. Fuller Torrey, p.135

THEFT AT THE SOLSVILLE HOTEL

A Christmas dance was held on 12-24-1863 at Solsville and a gang of the Loomis family on their way home from a dance at Barker’s Hotel, in Madison, stopped and entered the barroom. One got into an altercation over his bill and while he had the owner’s attention, the others selected the best overcoats hanging on the walls and left. (The hotel was operated by S.M. Palmer.)

Hamilton Democratic-Republican – December 31, 1863

MORE LOOMIS THEFTS ??

Although the above story specifically identifies that members of the Loomis Gang were involved in the theft of overcoats, there were a number of other area thefts that could have been Loomis related.

- Wednesday – Six overcoats, two shawls, and seven yards of broadcloth stolen from a peddler’s wagon parked in the barn of Flavius Wentworth, Madison Center. Friday – 500 lbs. of butter stolen from Evan T. Davis, Madison Center. Friday – A buffalo robe stolen from Hamilton Brownell of Madison. – Madison Observer – November 6, 1862.

- Shoes were stolen from the store of William Coolidge in Bouckville. – Waterville Times – May 7, 1863.
- 600 lbs. of butter stolen from the cellar of James Manchester of Madison. – Hamilton Democratic-Republican – October 15, 1863.
- A \$350 gold watch and chain from Samuel White, Jr. of Madison. – Madison Observer – October 28, 1863.
- Lane's Store in Madison was robbed of nearly \$1,000 worth of watches and jewelry.– Hamilton Democratic-Republican – November 19, 1863.
- A building owned by Samuel White of Madison, and used for the accommodation of hop pickers, was entered and crockery, table cutlery, and bed ticks were stolen. Around the same time, a buffalo robe was stolen from Rufus Brown of Tyler Street.– Madison Observer – January 20, 1864.
- During an Independence Ball at S.M. Palmer's Hotel in Solsville, his barn was entered and two harnesses were stolen. – Madison County Leader and Observer – July 20, 1864.
- The home of W.O. Rowland, of Madison, was entered and several ladies cloaks were taken. – Hamilton Democratic-Republican – September 8, 1864.
- A buffalo robe owned by John Morgan, of Madison, was stolen from his wagon.– Hamilton Democratic-Republican – July 6, 1865.

(As we stated above, the thefts were not specifically attributed to the Loomis Gang, but with a gang of over 100 individuals it would seem that many of the thefts were gang related. The time period for the thefts certainly supports that idea.)

MORE ON THE THEFT AT SAMUEL WHITE'S HOME

About 2 o'clock, on Saturday, the 17th of October, 1863, the house of Samuel White, Jr., one mile east of Madison Village, was entered. Mr. White was sleeping on a lounge, dressed, with a dim light burning in the room. He had in his pocket a considerable sum of money, and a gold watch and chain which cost \$350.

The thief succeeded in getting possession of the watch and chain, and was in the act of rifling his pockets when Mr. White awoke and called for help. The thief fled, making good his escape with the watch.

By the lounge on which Mr. White was sleeping, was also found a heavy club, doubtless intended for use if necessary.

Madison Observer – October 28, 1863

A MEETING IN MADISON

By 1866, the citizens of Central New York had finally had enough of the outrages of the Loomis Gang. In the week following the shooting of Sheriff Filkins, meetings were held in various communities to come up with a plan to end the Loomis Gang activities. One such meeting was held in Madison.

Those who attended these meetings decided that they would meet on Saturday afternoon, June 16, 1866, travel to the Loomis farm, and end the Loomis threat. Men arrived at the Exchange Hotel in Morrisville from Stockbridge, Peterboro, Canastota, Oneida, and Morrisville. All were armed.

The men left Morrisville at dusk and were joined by similar groups coming from Madison and Hamilton. Closer to the Loomis farm, men were arriving from North Brookfield and Waterville. By the time they reached the Loomis farm, there were over 100 well-armed men with weapons of all types, plus a keg of gunpowder and a stout rope.

The Loomis home was burned as were the barns and sheds. The activities of the Loomis Gang were effectively ended that night.

Frontier Justice by E. Fuller Torrey, p.181

HOW IRONIC !!

When we hear the words Loomis Gang, we remember a family that was involved in all kinds of criminal activities. Yet today, we see the name LOOMIS on trucks that deliver and pick up cash at banking institutions. It is a well-respected company. The irony could not be more pronounced.